

EVGENY  
BOGAT

# ETERNAL MAN

REFLECTIONS  
DIALOGUES  
PORTRAITS

PROGRESS PUBLISHERS

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# ETERNAL MAN

REFLECTIONS

DIALOGUES

PORTRAITS

Translated from the Russian by *Christine Bushnell*

Е. БОГАТ  
**Вечный человек**

*На английском языке*

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## From the Author

New historical epochs have dawned many times on our planet. A new epoch has arrived, once again, today. But unlike people living before our own time, we see and sense this newness with the greatest awareness and clarity. In earlier times, the dawn of new epoch did not mean that children would live much differently than their grandparents did in the past, but today, the tremendous changes befalling mankind are so overwhelming that grandparents and grandchildren often cannot even understand one another.

Today, artists, writers and scholars are examining a new epoch which truly is without parallel in history. Life is swiftly changing, traditions are being destroyed, a new tenor of life and human relationships is taking shape. American sociologist Alvin Toffler is fully justified in asserting that we—the 800th generation on earth—live at an unprecedented and fantastically accelerated evolutionary pace. Man's ever-growing dependence upon technology, the breakdown of communication between people, the neuroses and tensions are, in his opinion, a new illness which he figuratively terms *future shock*. And, indeed, this notion characterizes bourgeois societies which, more and more, are becoming faceless societies. It is not mere happenstance that the American writer Alfred Bester named his much-talked-of utopia *The Demolished Man*. The capitalist world produces faceless people because it lacks Humanity, a Human Face, and thus

capitalism has failed to become the great hope of humanity. The hope instead is communism, which sees the goal of social development in man himself, in his perpetual striving for self-perfection.

Future shock seems terrifying only if one fails to remember that 799 generations have come before our own, the 800th. The resources of mankind consist not only of the immediate material and spiritual achievements of culture and civilization, but also of less visible factors: the feelings, aspirations, soul searching, quest for truth, pain of injustices, and belief in a better future by all who came before us—those who questioned, who loved, fought, and at times sacrificed their lives for the sake of a better future.

But one great feature of the 800th generation, our generation, is, it seems to me, that a new awareness has taken hold *en masse*, an awareness that was restricted earlier to only a select few—an awareness of history. I have in mind here our feeling of communion with everything in the world that came before us, the fullness of past riches, and at times, suffering. It is striking that this awareness appeared simultaneously with the desire to influence the course of history, to rebuild the world.

Never before has man borne so enormous an emotional and spiritual heritage—a heritage that is at times unconscious, but nevertheless influences our actions and way of thinking. In the mad hustle and bustle of modern life we may forget the crucified slaves—the comrades-in-arms of Spartacus, the selflessness of the builders of gothic cathedrals, the love of Abélard and Héloïse, the heroes of the French Revolution and the Paris Commune, the self-denial of the wives of the Decembrists and the great moral strength of Russian revolutionaries. We may, I repeat, forget all this in the commotion of everyday life, but it does not desert us, it lives in us, and this makes the future shock not so ominous as it seems today.

I certainly do not wish to imply here that the modern world is stable and secure. In *Eternal Man*, the third book of a trilogy on man's moral world (the two preceding works—*Are Wicked Sorcerers Immortal?* and *Wonder*—will be dealt with in retrospect in *Eternal Man*), I have tried to capture the spiritual life of compatriots and contemporaries.

There is a fascinating passage in Marx which states that communism is impossible unless the riches of the past can be preserved. This has been the inspiration for my books on the spiritual world of modern Soviet man.

The individual who remains "eternal" bears the distinct, never-to-be-repeated mark of his epoch. *Eternal Man* is dedicated to the eternal in man and to the spirit of the present age, to their union and at times paradoxical interpenetration.

As I worked on this book I tried to imagine the faces of future readers. The faces I saw were laughing, frowning, and expressing either amazement or alarm. As facial expressions changed I saw something I especially appreciated—the obvious look of concentration from which new thoughts arise. I admire thoughtful faces, and when they appear before me I realize that a line or paragraph has succeeded. I wish only one thing: that my readers will think along with me.

A book is a house of fantastic dimensions. One may dwell there a while and leave, but one can also stay there forever without disturbing those who settled there earlier. I wrote this book dreaming about a reader who would live on here, with me, forever.





# TRUTHS AND PARADOXES

*Reflections*



## Nietzsche's Walking Stick

The scientific and technological revolution has raised a number of complex philosophical and psychological issues that cause lively discussions in the modern world. Despite the novelty of the startling developments in science and technology, many of the issues raised are, in themselves, not actually new; they have been explored by scholars of past centuries. What is new is that today these issues have become alarmingly concrete. Earlier thought on immortality was purely religious or utopian and abstract in character; today Arthur Clarke goes so far as to predict the approximate date when this dream will come true. Humanity now finds that the eternal questions have taken a new and frightening turn—questions about the meaning of life, whether every human being is of equal value, whether morality is absolute or relative.

I have chosen one of the hundreds of possible approaches to this polemic: the fate of Nietzsche's philosophical heritage, an issue which is indeed one of the old and at the same time one of the most striking contemporary problems. The issue is not so much that a number of countries have begun new scholarly editions of his works and systematically publish articles on his philosophy. One of the latest is an article of the French publicist Louis Soubise that has the typical title: "Nietzsche Among Us". There was even a novel by the well-known cultural sociologist Jean Auger Duvignaud, whose hero, driven by a desire to experience the Nietzschean

complex, travels to Turin where the author of *Beyond Good and Evil* himself spent his "last days of fame and suffering". But despite such popularity, we know that thinkers and writers who are fashionable today may be completely forgotten tomorrow. The most striking thing about Nietzsche today, however, is the attempt to introduce his philosophical ideas into the modern system of technocratic thought and technocratic morality.

Nietzsche was, of course, an irrationalist, a proponent of intuitive cognition of reality. He had an ironic attitude toward science as a discipline and he hated rationalists. The fact that today his name is held aloft by technocrats can be viewed as one of the paradoxes of the second half of the 20th century. To grasp the logic, the mechanism, if you will, of this paradox, we shall have to recall some of the events in the life and work of the "hermit from Sils-Maria".

Nietzsche's sister, Elizabeth Förster Nietzsche was ninety when she gave Hitler a walking stick. It was the one the philosopher used to take along on walks through alpine meadows, along the canals of Venice and streets of Nice. Elizabeth Förster was now a tiny, elderly woman and had, it would seem, nothing in common with the lively young woman who, light-years ago, in the nineteenth century, inspired her less viable relative. However, she really had not changed at all in spirit. Once, when Nietzsche was young, well-intentioned German burghers gave him what was a most ironic gift—a bust of Voltaire. Elizabeth burst into tears. So this is what free thinking leads to—they see in dear Friedrich a follower of that Parisian monkey. This event was a blow to Elizabeth's German dignity, but now, as the führer fondled Nietzsche's walking stick, Elizabeth was in her glory. Hitler was not a philosopher, but he did love carrying that stick.

Perhaps Nietzsche had this walking stick with him in the Alps on the day the notion of the

"eternal return" first came to him. He wept that day, feeling that this idea lent eternity to every transitory phenomenon. Some day a man, an exact replica of himself, might sit on this very rock in the mountains and discover the same truth—each moment returns and thus has an ever-lasting significance. It seemed to Nietzsche that fate had raised him some 6500 feet high—not just above sea level, but above a trivial understanding of things.

What would he think of the notion of "eternal return" had he, like his sister, lived to the day when Hitler paraded about with Nietzsche's walking stick in hand? And, should Nietzsche's doctrine be correct, then we can one day expect that this very chain of events will be repeated.

Despite his loneliness, Nietzsche almost broke off his relationship with Elizabeth when she married a vulgar nationalist, one who snorted at the name of Voltaire. Nietzsche was fascinated by Montaigne, Stendhal, and Dostoyevsky, he could not live without music and, judging from the recollections of others, he was kind-hearted and never spurned the compassion and sympathy of those around him. Nietzsche was so shy that he could not bring himself to declare his love to the one woman dear to him. He dreamed of ennobling humanity: in his seclusion he tore down old idols and reappraised old values. He wrote books that left contemporary Germany ironically indifferent and, while admiring men of action, did nothing in his lifetime to become one of them.

Nietzsche was acutely aware of the smallest changes in the world about him. He lost sleep from slight fluctuations in the temperature; he sobbed when he heard about the fire in the Louvre—it seared his heart and soul. He went insane and spent the last ten years of his life, plunged in dark thoughts in a hospital.

Nevertheless, in the not wealthy, but comfortable, old-fashioned homes of respectable people he would express a romantic yearning for ... cruelty.

"Cruelty," he exclaimed, "is the most ancient joy of mankind." And with no less enthusiasm he demanded: "Oh grant me insanity, immortal Gods! Insanity—so that I can believe in myself!"

It is paradoxical that had he been alive during Hitler's reign, Nietzsche's death would likely have been speeded up by artificial means—he probably would not have died of madness, but would have instead been chosen as a victim of state or prison authorities. People like Nietzsche were condemned by the very logic of the fascist regime which would tolerate neither the breadth and diversity of the intellect, nor physical infirmities. Thus there can be no doubt that the existence of Hitler—with his militant ignorance, superficial demagogery, luckless buffoonery—would have offended Nietzsche's moral, and especially his esthetic, feelings. For Nietzsche was attracted to antiquity; he dreamed of a new "tragic individual" and a new "tragic era". Hitler, however, was far from being one of Aeschylus' heroes.

But the paradox, or, as Marx and Engels liked to say—the irony, of history was that Hitler—with his government, ideology, party, cult of cruelty and force, enmity to reason—drew Nietzsche's philosophy to its most logical conclusion, and more precisely, bloody culmination. Hitler was far from intellectual, never having read the divine Plato or the enchanting Montaigne, and he isolated the very essence of Nietzsche's philosophy, freeing it from romantic covers and the vague yearning for the great and the tragic. The walking stick Nietzsche took along as he pondered *Zarathustra*, had to turn up, in the end, in the hands of a fascist führer. The fate of the walking stick was sealed. And had Zarathustra really existed, one suspects he would have smiled sadly—the smile of a sage—the day ninety-year-old Elizabeth Förster Nietzsche gave the walking stick to her führer.

Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra* sets forth the doctrine of the "eternal return" and the notion of

the superman. Man, says Zarathustra, is a creature of shame and suffering that must be outgrown. That is why Zarathustra, a sage, lives high in the mountains where he will not have to look at vulgar mankind. Only rarely does he venture down to the people, revealing to them the truths obtained in peace and solitude. Zarathustra and, of course, Nietzsche along with him, views man as a *transitional being* on the road to something higher. Man does not possess value in himself; his existence can perhaps be justified only by the individual who, smiling at the tragic in life, asserts the highest culture upon the ruins of the decaying world. This aristocratic personality is completely devoid of virtues that weaken modern man—compassion, pity, unselfishness. Instead, his aristocratic nature worships war and art. Zarathustra would ennoble mankind by restoring the power that has been lost during 2,500 years of European civilization; he would lead man to the creation of the highest values. Man, for Zarathustra, is a formless mass, a material, a shapeless rock that demands a sculptor.

Zarathustra boldly rises above both love and compassion and even above that "great aversion" toward man. "For the good—they cannot create,..." Nietzsche loved to repeat. "For the creators are hard."

Zarathustra also carries out the same refrain. His passionate will to create draws him anew to man just as a hammer finds its way to stone. He cries out that an image, the image of his images, lies slumbering within the stone, awaiting him, dreaming, even in the hardest, most shapeless hunk of rock. His hammer strikes out wildly against the walls of its prison. Small pieces fly into the air but he pays no heed, for what are they to him? Zarathustra feels the beauty of the superman descend upon him and ecstatically shatters the rock beneath his hammer: "Of what account now are the Gods to me!"



he idea of the superman is never embodied, either by the philosopher or by his hero Zarathustra, in a precise, tangible image. Poetic imagination does not, and cannot—without irrecoverable loss—pass over into reality. Nietzsche is attempting to unite incompatible elements: love for war and love for art; cruelty and creative power; lack of compassion and a humaneness that arises from mysterious, unapparent sources; a tragic perception of the world and a fair degree of insensitivity. Since such ideas are compatible only in the poetic imagination, Nietzsche was unable to create a living image of man's successor. Because of the imperative, indisputable, exacting laws of realistic art and of life itself, he was unable to go beyond the genre of the dithyramb.

When it looked as though the aristocratic utopia would be realized, the superman seemed strikingly arithmetical, rather than algebraic. He possessed the sum total of negative qualities, but had no positive ones. He loved war, but alas, not art. He was indisputably cruel, but nothing could be done about it for he wasn't endowed with creative powers. He was not compassionate, nor did he possess that mysterious humaneness. And finally, he was as insensitive as a buffalo and utterly lacked a high, tragic perception of the world.

Aren't the little pieces that were chipped from the rock (Zarathustra's tiny, virtuous, grey people) of incomparably and immeasurably greater value than the hero who was born under the blows of the hammer?

The superman captivated Nietzsche's adherents precisely because it was a poetic rather than a philosophic idea. Among his adherents—before fascism—were members of the bourgeois intelligentsia who were subjectively honest and romantic in cast of mind. They had dreamed abstractly about a "new mankind". Nietzsche started philosophizing—and extremely logically at that—somewhat later, when he began giving

serious thought to the social conditions which foster the superman: submissiveness of the "debased majority"; castes, and a military government. His fragmentary notes on this question are not entirely romantic, though quite constructive. They show no signs of his illness despite the fact that they were written shortly before he went insane. A Nietzsche little known to his romantic adherents, explained the essence of his ideas in a style that was hardly dithyrambic and Zarathustrian. Nietzsche wanted to reduce man to as functional a role as possible, granting him only the virtues of a machine. He felt it necessary to teach man to bear suffering and to discover in anguish some sort of higher reward. A mechanical level of existence, viewed as the most noble, the most elevated, must deify itself. Great culture must arise out of a broad base of thriving mediocrity. Nietzsche felt that the sole aim for still very many years must be the diminishing of man, for one must first build a wide base upon which a strong mankind could arise.

We sense that this speech is no longer a boy's but a man's against the background of Zarathustra's lyric songs of the high luminary of being and words of eternal beauty descending unto him. Bourgeois civilization has managed to realize the idea of "degrading man" and to impart to him the virtues of the machine and of rampant complacency. As distinct from realizing the idea of the superman bourgeois society degraded man with almost mathematical precision, without the slightest loss.

As American sociologist Erich Fromm writes, man has died — the day is not far off when man will be "transformed into a part of the total machine, well fed and entertained, yet passive, unalive, and with little feeling". Even though a strong mankind has not and indeed cannot rise out of this soil, this must not detract from Nietzsche's stature as a philosopher. It is not Nietzsche's fault that civilizations which have followed his ideas and have

achieved distinct success in *degrading* man, cannot give birth to a hero.

The idea of degrading man not only reveals Nietzsche's evolution from poet and romantic to consistent social thinker. It also represents a curious, sad metamorphosis of a West European notion, or more specifically, of a West European feeling. The longing for great passions that many Western intellectuals had experienced in most bizarre forms since the beginning of the nineteenth century, reached its final stage in the notion of degrading man. This longing was expressed in its highest, purest, and most *active* form in Stendhal, Nietzsche's favorite writer.

Nietzsche always wanted to be like Stendhal. As a youth, he followed Stendhal's advice that one should begin social life as if entering into a duel. Nietzsche wrote a pamphlet against David Strauss, a respected, serious philosopher who, from Nietzsche's point of view, embodied German philistinism. The "duel" ended when Strauss died a few weeks after the pamphlet was published. Nietzsche punished himself for a long time for, what seemed to him, bringing about the death of a respected and essentially fine individual. As far as I know he never again raced into any duels. Once he did, however, want to challenge someone to a duel, but it was over a trivial affair rather than philosophy. The individual was the man who had robbed him of the woman he loved. But Nietzsche did not give in to the temptation, having convinced himself that the seducer and intriguer was not worthy of such an honor.

In a later period Nietzsche wanted, like Stendhal, to magnanimously endure the non-recognition he received from his contemporaries—since the duel he began against society was quickly forgotten. But he could not keep up this show of magnanimity; he was shaken and hurt by a non-comprehending reading public and the cold curiosity of philosophy departments. To be like Stendhal Nietzsche himself

had to have as great a personality as Stendhal. But the distance between the personality of Stendhal and that of Nietzsche—who was unquestionably original but lacked the integrity and greatness of Stendhal—is the story of the degeneration of the longing for great individuals into a desire to debase man.

Stendhal succeeded in capturing the tragic nature and tragic emotions of the world. During his lifetime, he experienced the crisis of the epoch—the departure of great figures and grand emotions—just as one experiences crises in one's own fate. His childhood coincided with the French Revolution; his youth—with the Napoleonic wars, in which he took part. When the Bourbons returned to Paris he was thirty years old. He found the atmosphere of post-Napoleonic Europe, the land of rising shopkeepers and declining aristocrats, stifling. But only in Italy—in Rome, Florence and Naples—did he find a refreshing gust of fresh air. There he was revived by conversations with revolutionaries, by the awareness of the fullness of the spiritual life which ordinary men and women there dared to preserve. They were people who knew how to love, hate, fight and die. And Stendhal, after the barrenness and conceit of the Paris of Louis XVIII, delighted in the world of grand emotions. Stendhal himself loved, hated, fought and apparently would have been willing to give up his life had the situation demanded it. Italy also succeeded in satisfying his yearning for grand emotions, for here he found *Métilde Dembowsky* who gave him both his greatest happiness and sadness. Here too he met the Carbonari who restored his faith in man and in revolution. Stendhal's experience reveals that such yearning cannot be assuaged by feats of the imagination nor, moreover, by artificial lyrical and philosophical invention. Life, itself, was what was required.

A number of decades later, a writer of another generation, Flaubert, also longed for the tragic. He

found the atmosphere even more stifling than had Stendhal, and after *Madame Bovary*, in *Salammbô*, Flaubert sought great figures far, far removed from the banal present day. He found them in the Carthage of the third century B. C. Thus Flaubert-the-writer undoubtedly experienced grand moments, but was Flaubert-the-man satisfied?

Stendhal, longing for the great in man, showed wisdom in seeking greatness in life as well as in his own heart. He didn't allow himself distant excursions into history, useless flights of fancy, nor chance utopias. It is particularly tempting, of course, to think that things were easier for Stendhal than for others because there was greatness in the world. But were there really no epochs in the history of mankind when greatness is not either departing or arriving anew?

Stendhal never cut himself off from reality and never once reproached the humaneness in man. He could dislike his contemporaries and compatriots, but he never ceased loving man in general. Though he often became almost physically ill in confrontations with people, he never changed his law: "Man—is the highest goal." Even at the worst moments he didn't allow himself to doubt in man, in his future. When he stated that readers would still understand him 100 years later he meant that a man and not some mysterious, fantastic, superior being would understand him. Anguish over the great figures and grand emotions which had disappeared during his lifetime, intensified his love and concern for man. For Stendhal, himself, was a great figure who experienced grand emotions.

The lesson Stendhal offers is especially important—for a great person there is no such thing as being "too human". Despite Nietzsche's attraction to Stendhal, however, he never understood this lesson and, in fact, he did not succeed to be like Stendhal at all. As a writer he lacked Stendhal's clarity and force, and as a man he lacked Stendhal's

greatness. But, of course, it wasn't just Nietzsche—the epoch itself was different.

In his youth, Nietzsche had experienced the yearning for the sublime and the tragic, but after a few attempts (war-time service as a medical orderly or romanticizing Bismarck) he gave up hope of finding the tragic and the sublime in life itself. He quickly realized that neither bureaucratic, monarchical Germany nor bourgeois Europe could assuage his longing. While Stendhal had had the good fortune to find great figures in the old world, Nietzsche's lifetime coincided with that moment in the development of the European spirit when the world about him no longer had great personalities. In this sense the old reality had utterly exhausted itself and the new world was giving birth to a social reality that evoked the terror of the aristocratically inclined thinker who feared the "crowd" and longed for a society of the elect. When the best hearts of the new Europe wept over communards shot at the walls of the Père La Chaise, Nietzsche wept because street battles caused a fire in the Louvre that threatened his favorite canvases.

The person who finds no gratification in his immediate surroundings begins to love art rapturously, to be intoxicated by art. He develops a purely esthetic perception of the world which leads, according to a cruel, mysterious logic of things, to the destruction of beauty, rather than to beauty itself. Strange illusions arise, such as the notion that the years of the greatest social injustice are the most "beautiful". Several months before the Paris Commune, the troops of Bismarck, the Iron Chancellor, launched an offensive on Paris. Nietzsche, the philologist-medic, surrounded by wounded soldiers, imagined that the war had an ideal, elevated goal: to liberate the statue of Venus de Milo! The immorality of a purely esthetic perception of the world is seen in a love for immortal canvases and a lack of awareness of the beauty and value of man. And this is precisely why a purely esthetic

perception of the world leads to the destruction of beauty in life. In keeping with his esthetic perception, Nietzsche naïvely wondered: "Is it really forbidden to admire a cruel man as one admires a wild landscape?" To the thinker, a militant aesthete, it seemed that unless one could teach people to soar above morality, life will be stifling. In his imagination he envisaged this soaring above as some marvellous "dance". But—miracle of miracles—once morality is done away with, life becomes more difficult, rigid, and more 'mechanical' than it was before the "dance"—the soul is wrested from life. Goodness refreshes, rather than stifles, life.

When Nietzsche turned to history in his search for greatness, he saw art rather than life. He was drawn from the Germany and Europe of his own time to the days of the birth of ancient tragedy. Ancient tragedy satisfied his love of the irrational, for he felt tragedy arose from the original, cruel, exuberant god of wine, Dionysus. Tragedy was created by a powerful feeling for life at a time when man, intoxicated by the novelty of existence, sensed—with pangs of joy—the overwhelming power within himself. Tragedy contained the elemental force of a new world. It was the "triumphant spring efflorescence, the passionate Sabbath of many sensations".

Nietzsche often wrote of his hatred for decadents and decadence and of his love of strength. He himself wanted to be a conqueror, a leader, a sailor of the seas, an adventurer. But he never became any of these. He calls to mind the adage: a good man rarely speaks of goodness and a strong man writes no hymns to strength. Schopenhauer thought about goodness and compassion, but did not possess a drop of goodness or compassion. Nietzsche sang endless hymns to power and thus created his own compensatory illusions. Nietzsche's

love for power was the most dangerous form of decadence. He created masterful illusions as well as myths about himself: he thought he was suffering from an excess of life; he interpreted the euphoria and ecstasy of his illness as intoxicating power.

After he finished his work on the birth of ancient tragedy Nietzsche wrote a letter in which he stated with startling candor: "I'm afraid of the real world, I no longer see anything real, but one huge phantasmagoria. I am afraid.... I do not see. I am afraid to see."

A man cannot go on living if he thinks that nothing is real. One might suppose that Nietzsche turned to ancient tragedy specifically in search of reality. But despite a number of discoveries—of course, subjective discoveries—it is apparent from Nietzsche's letters that he found no substitute for living reality in history. And who, one wonders, could find it there?

"Lost reality" is a formula that sums up fairly well Nietzsche's personal tragedy. The only thing left for him to do was to go up into the mountains with Zarathustra, reflect, and try to find reality in the future. Nietzsche rejoiced: Here it is! It's in the future. But how can this be the case if the superman had already, once, long, long ago, created ancient tragedy from the sheer excess of his power? Nietzsche would find nothing essentially new in the future. The same powerful feelings about life, drunken existence, the "triumphant efflorescence of spring, the Sabbath...". The future had already occurred. And Nietzsche had simply transferred the things he liked best about antiquity to the world of the future, once the initial excitement over his discovery of the superman had subsided.

In his youth Nietzsche wrote that if genius and art were the ultimate goals of Hellenist culture, then all aspects of Hellenist society must be necessary mechanisms on the path toward this great goal. One of the "mechanisms" is slavery.



One of Nietzsche's biographers writes that as a youth Nietzsche shuddered before such a form of cruelty and was enraptured by its awesome beauty. Later, after Zarathustra, when Nietzsche was working out a type of aristocratic, military-caste government, he wrote about slavery without batting an eye, dispassionately, precisely.

People who have lost touch with reality inevitably wind up as reactionary utopians. This is their revenge upon a world in which they find neither great figures nor grand passions. Thus arises one of the worst possible desires: the desire to degrade man. The evolution of this idea is curious indeed. It began with a longing for the tragic and the sublime, with losing hold of reality and attempting to recover it in history and in the future, with a subsequent curtailing of ethical values—compassion, pity, goodness. And it ended with the desire to degrade man and, eventually, with insanity.

The European spirit in Nietzsche rejected old idols and good, old ideals. Some day historians may study precisely how this intellectual adventurism ultimately gave rise to political adventurism.

Nietzsche, as an expression of the European spirit at a particular moment of crisis, is an especially curious figure. He is no less representative than Faust or Stendhal, though he represents the philosophical culmination of Europe's greatest tragedy—the loss of humaneness. Nietzsche flung Renaissance humanism into an abyss; his despairing pleas for a new barbarism have echoed down through time.

At the end of the nineteenth century one notes a definite tendency in great European literature, a tendency to be weary of man.\* The danger of this

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\* It is also apparent in painting. In Van Gogh the world is new, exciting, not fixed, and young, but man is old, sad. Man is older than the world, older than the universe; should he not give way to younger, more active and stronger forms of life? And finally, the world is more beautiful without man than with him because—and this is a bizarre note—the most inactive, bigoted, and cruel thing in life—is man.

tendency was that it wasn't overt, but assumed fascinating ironic and romantic forms. Artists who displayed their weariness of mankind deluded both their readers and themselves with beautiful dreams of a new mankind, a new strong personality. Oscar Wilde, Knut Hamsun, Ibsen, and Nietzsche in particular, expressed this tendency. Though the European spirit had at one time idolized man, it now turned from him. Perhaps this was just one more instance of the "cunning" of the Hegelian Universal Reason which demands a great culture be a great technological civilization in which there is no and can be no worshipping of man.

European bourgeois culture never accepted, as a goal in itself, the worshipping of man—this is possible only in communist society which gives man back his humanity. Even at the peak of bourgeois humanism, value judgments (which were, of course, hardly disinterested) were put into utilitarian terms that responded to the interests of social and economic power. The highest goal was not man himself, but that which stood beyond him. And when this high point was over, the decaying culture looked upon man with sad, cutting irony: culture was weary of man and felt he was no longer needed. On the morrow that culture would become a technological civilization and its fate would be decided not by man, but by highly organised masses ("thriving mediocrity") and technology. Thus the more degradation man would suffer pleasing technology with the "virtues of the machine", the better off industrial (or post-industrial) society would be.

The current interest in Nietzsche in the West, with its technological power and man's powerlessness in the face of social ills, is not mere happenstance. Aristocratic mores have been deemed worthy of technocrats and businessmen. The attitude of modern technocracy toward eternal values, toward the Ten Commandments, differs little, in essence, from Nietzsche's attitude. But

what Nietzsche did in rather dramatic and inspired romantic fashion, technocracy handles efficiently day in day out. Today's business world reappraises values without any clamor or lyric songs. Despite the beneficent, romantic aura of aristocratic mores, they have always been, at base, utilitarian. Aristocratic mores derive from an awareness of one's privileged position and from the desire for more sweeping domination. Nietzsche affirmed that the criteria of truth lie in the elevation of the feeling of power. From this point of view, the modern technological world is not only more powerful but more true to live than past worlds.

In discussing the weariness of man I named artists who had quite different fates. Wilde was incarcerated in Reading Gaol by English society and later died in loneliness and poverty, having understood too late that goodness is higher than beauty, that the highest beauty is the beauty of goodness. Hamsun lived till our day, became an avowed fascist and died without ever understanding anything of consequence in life. I am fairly sure that neither Nietzsche nor Wilde would ever have become fascists. But at the end of the nineteenth century Wilde, Hamsun, Ibsen and Nietzsche did express a particular tendency, a tendency developed most explicitly and conclusively by Nietzsche.

Nietzsche loved Dostoyevsky. At times I feel the creator of *Zarathustra* was not a real person, but a child of Dostoyevsky's imagination, a hero from one of his novels. This impression is also borne out by Nietzsche's spiritual fate—so similar to that of Ivan Karamazov—and by the fact that the ideas of the German philosopher (the man-god, eternal return, the two moralities—for the ruler and the slave, and the cruelty of creative individuals) had already been expressed by Dostoyevsky's heroes: Raskolnikov, Kirillov, Stavrogin, and Ivan

Karamazov. And is not the brilliant dialectical relationship of Ivan Karamazov to Smerdyakov reminiscent of the relationship between Nietzsche and fascism? (What Ivan Karamazov accomplishes on a tremendously high mental level, Smerdyakov carries out with a lackey's accuracy at the lowest level of life.) But though Nietzsche may recall Ivan Karamazov, Nietzsche has little in common with Dostoyevsky himself. Dostoyevsky dreamed about the *perfection* rather than the greatness of man. For Dostoyevsky, the goal of humanity was not to give birth to geniuses or eternal art, but to achieve harmony and understanding. Both men bravely looked into man's soul, and while Nietzsche discovered great loathing, Dostoyevsky saw great suffering. Both men have been called "cruel" but their cruelty sharply differs in origin, form, and substance. A person may be cruel out of excessive compassion or agonizing helplessness—as Dostoyevsky was "cruel". Or, he may be cruel because of loneliness, lack of recognition, and a weakness which longs to become a strength. Is this Nietzsche's cruelty? Yes. In Nietzsche's case, it can perhaps be explained by his lack of success as an artist. Neither Nietzsche himself nor his biographers—as far as I know—mention this desire, though in the rhythmic speech of Zarathustra, one readily senses a poet who could no longer remain silent. Only once does Nietzsche mention, in a rather candid letter, that he was not much of a poet at all. For Nietzsche, with the exuberant self-assertion and the intoxicating self-admiration of his later years, this is a surprising admission. Can it be that his greatest pain was hidden from the rest of the world? Personally I'm afraid of people who want to be artists but do not succeed. At times, behind their kind-heartedness, lies astonishing cruelty.

The helpless and anguish-ridden artist in Nietzsche was apparent in the rhythmic lyrical reflections of a wise spirit up in the mountains. But the hapless artist was also manifest in far more

important ways. Failing to express himself artistically, Nietzsche probably and, if you will, arrogantly applied his extra talents to philosophy. And this proved most opportune for Nietzsche, because there is only one thing left for a person who has lost touch with reality and does not dare to find it: to replace reality with illusions. If this individual happens to be a philosopher, then the illusions necessarily take on his own world-view. Nietzsche more and more excitedly elaborated such an illusion—which he blasphemously called “life”. He took revenge upon that lost reality by calling his illusions reality.

Nietzsche's concept of life wasn't at all similar to that of Stendhal or Dostoyevsky, although it does have certain things in common with Wilde's and Hamsun's conceptions of life. Nietzsche's conception was purely esthetic and could be measured by a particular abstract beauty, that had no social or ethical content. It was beauty that had no regard for goodness or love for man, but was, nonetheless, powerful. But because absolute beauty does not exist in this world, then beauty which has no regard for goodness is turned into—I hope my readers will pardon me for this sad paradox—the “beauty of evil”. And power? The more there is, the more there should be some humaneness in it so that it cannot be turned from good into evil. Power (even creative power) that is deprived of humaneness is like love deprived of pity—subjected to “demonic deviations”, i.e. made destructive. (We have been convinced of this many times—especially with regard to the technological power of modern reality.) For Nietzsche, life is specifically beauty and power by themselves, outside of the morals that, according to Nietzsche, assassinate them.

He never stops repeating that the moral individual is a more base and weak type than the immoral individual. He evaluates the individual by the degree of the power and of his will. He evaluates the strength of the will by the extent of its

resistance—the degree to which it can bear pain and suffering and use them to its own advantage. Nietzsche tried to convince himself and his readers that the wealth of the personality and one's overflowing inner life are incompatible with morality.

Life, as a purely esthetic value, is like one huge theater—not unlike those of antiquity—in which even from the last row we have an excellent view of Alexander the Great. But it is hard to find Socrates, because to perform in this theater one must wear cothurni. And the wise man from Athens goes barefoot.

Nietzsche even dreamed about Cesare Borgia, thinking that had Borgia become the Pope of Rome, European culture would not have declined and degenerated. But Borgia, of course, killed people right and left—on the streets, in their beds, at balls and on the roads; he seduced his sister and gleefully poisoned dinner guests. Perhaps Nietzsche viewed anyone who had a very strong character, who was an “immoral monster”, as the “ironic antithesis” to his present-day, pathetically frightened German burghers. Nietzsche loved to irritate, to shock and to terrify people with his ironic antitheses. But his enthusiasm for Borgia, even if it is mere polemical, reveals the irretrievable loss of ethics inherent in a purely esthetic perception of reality.

I think that Nietzsche, as a man, was particularly aware of his own spiritual world and that he himself sensed the irretrievable loss. This knowledge infuriated him, engendered self-hatred as well as hatred for those around him, and it led him into ironic antitheses to an absurd degree. Treating life as a tremendous illusion can indeed destroy one's individuality. A number of studies on Nietzsche assert that from one decade to another he did not really change. Of course he did remain true to himself in something very important, his “aristocratic radicalism” (the formula of Danish

philosopher Georg Brandes) had become apparent in his youth. But Nietzsche's personality, like that of Ivan Karamazov, was debased. When the forty-year-old Nietzsche learned of an earthquake in Java, he cried out excitedly that the death of 200 thousand persons at one moment was splendid and that this was the end awaiting mankind. Thus, he was not only renouncing Montaigne, Goethe, Stendhal and Dostoyevsky; he was moving toward the brink of insanity.

Ivan Karamazov was tormented by the thought that if there is no immortality then there is no such thing as virtue.

For Nietzsche also, virtue had no particular value in itself; virtue had to be associated with something greater—immortality, beauty, power—before Nietzsche would not repudiate it. But when power and beauty triumph over the world (Alexander the Great and Napoleon were Nietzsche's favorite heroes) is virtue needed? It might seem superfluous especially along with immortality. But virtue is needed because there is no immortality in this world. Virtue has infinite value because it preserves the childlike innocence and purity of life.

Man has the opportunity to determine whether compassion and goodness are good or bad only because compassion and goodness really exist. If they did not exist, man would not either.

It is obvious that the illusion that the world abounds in goodness or the belief that it is full of evil, is equally dangerous. Reading Nietzsche and his earliest followers brings to mind the image of a child who has eaten too many biscuits. He doesn't want any more, takes a few bites, pouts, and pushes the rest away. As the nineteenth century waned there was a startling moment in history when several thinkers fancied that there was too much goodness in the world. Reading Nietzsche one might think that there was so much compassion in the world, plaguing mankind, that if people weren't warned of its terrible consequences, they would die

of compassion tomorrow. Nietzsche exclaims that we shall delight in people's sorrows rather than grieve over them. A moment later he deplors the fact that for present-day mankind humaneness has gone to great bounds.

Experiencing a weariness of mankind, Nietzsche and his followers also became weary of everything human—goodness, compassion, pity. They decided the reason culture was so quickly and painfully ageing was not because society had completed its ascending course, but because it was being weakened by the old virtues. To hell with virtues! Nietzsche and his followers were terrified by the thought that in the twentieth century there would be even greater compassion and pity in the world. Though they correctly sensed the growing crisis of bourgeois humanism, they did not understand two things. They did not realize that their illusion arose from the immortal achievements of humanism and that the final catastrophe of humanism would come with the triumph not of beauty, power, or the tragic man of a new tragic era, but with the completely inhuman, methodic cruelty of machines. Nor did they know that out of the ashes of the old humanism would arise not Siegfried, not even Napoleon, but Eichmann—the white-collar executioner. Such hardly esthetic ramifications were barred from their thinking but, alas, turned out to be the only real considerations. While philosophers in the late nineteenth century could allow themselves the luxury of placing humanism in doubt, we cannot take this liberty in the second half of the twentieth century—no more than a soldier returning from the war could step on a piece of bread. Our century has, in the end, robbed certain things of their charm: cruelty, barbarity, madness. In earlier eras such things might possibly have even taken on a romantic coloring, but the civilization of the technological era has stripped them of any remote semblance to humanism. And now the riddle remains: "What is the 'automaton of



good'?" Millions of people have already seen the "automaton of evil" in action.\*

In addition to his illusion that the world was overflowing with goodness, Nietzsche had the illusion that there was an excess of knowledge and reason. In the rational nineteenth century he yearned for the irrational. At this point history smiled down upon the worshipper of Dionysus. The irrational did not appear in the world in the form of a dancing god intoxicated by the power of existence. It appeared in rigid, impersonal forms. The cosy world of Dickens, which Nietzsche hated, was replaced by the world of Kafka, a world in which the hermit of Sils-Maria who never had to contend with bureaucracy would, I suppose, be absolutely helpless. Dickens' most inveterate scoundrels indeed seem kinder and more human than the finest persons in Kafka. Evil has captured the modern imagination and has entered the mundane world in earnest—without fantasy, without games. And this unique variant of evil has turned out to be most fantastic indeed. If Nietzsche could ever have imagined that the man of the future century would be insect, his understanding of the irrational would have undoubtedly been enriched.

But even Kafka was unable to imagine the bounds and forms of the future development of the irrational forces in the world. Luchino Visconti's film *La Caduta dei dei* (The Damned) depicts the rise and fall of the family of a respectable industrial magnate in nazi Germany. The will to dominate is combined here with sexual perversion, and political cunning with violent cruelty. The film splendidly depicts the "dionysian" essence of the fascist government: despite a formidable, exacting bureaucracy, it is irrational.

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\* To understand the de-estheticization of evil one need only juxtapose Dürer's *Apocalypse* with Picasso's *Guernica*.

Nietzsche could imagine whatever he wished—Sodom and Gomorrah, the last days of Pompeii, the eruption of thousands of volcanoes—but not an irrational bureaucracy. It is worth noting that in the twentieth century almost everything Nietzsche wished for has come true. How has this happened? Like a parody, a cruel paradox revealing the absolute infeasibility of Nietzsche's wishes, their romantic leap from the real world.

The leader who sent a shudder through the world turned out to be Hitler; triumph of the irrational became bureaucracy and the beauty of a "tragic century" was Hiroshima.

Nietzsche's error was to identify the thirst for life with the will to power. Great artists have depicted the highest moments of the human spirit, moments of utter concentration and, at the same time, of a feeling of harmony with the world: Andrei Bolkonsky on the battlefield of Austerlitz; Pierre Bezukhov seeing the comet over Moscow, Alexei Karamazov hugging the earth in ecstasy. How do such moments relate to the will to power? We could attribute meanings to "will to power" *ad infinitum*, but then it would simply lose all meaning. Is it possible to explain the happiness of Raphael and of Napoleon with only one formula? Perhaps, Nietzsche's most fatal mistake was that he did not distinguish man from the plant, let alone the animal, world—hence his worship of purely physiological values. But the fate which he had honored, laughed in his face. The man who had asserted that belief in the flesh is more fundamental than belief in the soul still had, in the last decade of his life, a strong and not aged body, but his soul was fading—he was no longer a man. In his unfinished work, *The Will to Power*, Nietzsche speaks of the development of spirituality that is necessary only for achieving relatively stable organization, a formula which technocrats today would willingly endorse. And Nietzsche, for his part,

would possibly agree with a present-day scholar's definition of suicide as a system which heals itself by the self-cauterization of its elements.

Nietzsche believed that when man's rational faculties were weakened by morality man's creative powers degenerated. Hence he felt it necessary to restore creative powers, at any cost. He wondered whether anyone at the end of the nineteenth century had a clear conception of what poets of powerful eras called inspiration. It is striking that this question should have been raised by a contemporary of Turgenev, Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, Flaubert, Maupassant, Heine, Dickens and Whitman. The fact that Nietzsche, with utter sincerity, thought his century was *uncreative*, reveals not only how difficult it is to appraise one's century from the inside. It also, and most importantly, reveals how Nietzsche himself understood creativity. Describing the inspiration he felt while working on *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, he wrote that he did not doubt that it would be necessary to go back a "thousand years" to find someone who would be able to tell him that he, too, had had a similar experience.

One needn't take Nietzsche's "thousand years" literally; it would seem that in referring to the poets of powerful eras he was longing for antiquity, the world before Socrates, the world of Homer, Pindar, and Aeschylus. It was later on that a wise, barefoot man appeared on the streets of Athens—a man who could deliver the death blow to poetry with his irony. Nietzsche hated Socrates precisely because, as it seemed to the author of *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Socrates destroyed the mighty era. An ugly, scoffing individual deprived the world of illusions of power, debunked great myths. Can poetry exist without illusions and myths? And because of Socrates, a rational moralist, Plato denounced art. Argumentation dedicated to Socrates leaves no doubt that for Nietzsche, the mighty era is an epoch which does not possess a clear moral consciousness.

Herein lies Nietzsche's understanding of creativity and of man.

In an article dedicated to Nietzsche, Thomas Mann juxtaposes Nietzsche to Shakespeare's Hamlet, in terms of the tremendous burden of knowledge that befell both men. This allows me to draw a rather interesting comparison between Hamlet's attitude toward travelling players, and Nietzsche's attitude towards tragedy as an art form. When Hamlet cried: "What's Hecuba to him!" he felt what we might term the power of art: art reminds us of our moral duty. The actor was bemoaning the legendary Hecuba who lived a thousand years before. This awakened in Hamlet not mysterious, irrational elements, but a clear desire to punish the concrete evil that now faced him personally. Parting with the actors, Hamlet does not have mad, vague sensations, but a completely firm resolve to revenge the death of his father. And later on, when he sets up the "mousetrap", with the actors' help, Hamlet again believes in the real power of the theater which is able to strike a direct blow at evil.

One could term this attitude toward art "anti-Nietzschean" or, if you will, Socratic. Nietzsche never would have been distressed to see an actor cry. Art for Nietzsche was incomparably more real than life; he could not see the man within the actor. One can cry out "What's Hecuba to him" only if life is far more real than art and if one is moved by a real, living person grieving over another real, living person—who has become legend in a hoary past that, too, is now legendary. This scene is moving, for these two individuals cannot bridge the gap of time, they stand at the doors to two different ages.

In Socrates' conception of life and art, the theater possesses a great moral influence, it can assist and ennoble man. But the attempt to place art above life does not enhance but degrades art, rendering it essentially worthless. The person who has lost touch with reality and tries to find it in art usually

ends up hating art. Art cannot satisfy his wild desires.

Herein lies the solution to the riddle of Nietzsche's attitude toward creativity. Surely any kind of creativity—in art, in love, in science—is a resurrection and a battle for immortality. But to resurrect, one must have *something* to resurrect, and Nietzsche had *nothing*. The art of antiquity was the one manifest, tangible reality for him. And surely the art of antiquity was itself, at one time, a resurrection and a battle for immortality. Nietzsche had neither feeling nor love for man and thus creativity was an abstract concept for him. He longed for "mighty eras", just as today people dream of civilizations other than the Earth.

The nineteenth century was the century of *La Comedie humaine* and the Ninth Symphony, the Russian novel and French painting, the century of Chopin, Pushkin, Dickens, Flaubert, Wagner and Rodin. (I will set aside the philosophical thought of Marx and Engels, with whom Nietzsche was entirely unfamiliar.) The nineteenth century was one of tremendous effort and the highest creativity, but Nietzsche demanded from it something more.

However it was not a question of personal demonism. Rather, there was cruel logic in the fact that the century was proclaimed an age of reason, instead of power. Bourgeois humanism, which fostered the creative minds of Europe for centuries, found in Nietzsche the final stage of self-knowledge and self-destruction. A great culture that had once been captivated by notions of spirituality, was now on the wane. It was a fabulously wealthy culture precisely because it had now reached the twilight of its development. Nietzsche sensed the pain and anguish of that classically bourgeois century (the last century of the absolute rule of the old world) with an almost pathological acuity. He himself was that pain and that anguish.

Nietzsche, with his "aristocratic radicalism", did not see the prospects that lay ahead for a new humanism and a new culture. There seemed to be no way out of the present situation. And, when Zarathustra proclaims: "God is dead," we feel that man, too, is dead. Nietzsche began having wild dreams about a man-god—as though out of the dead god and dead man it were possible to create a new, powerful being who could rejuvenate the world. But, if god and man were dead, so was creativity. Could the man-god give birth to a *Moonlight Sonata* or *War and Peace*? From Nietzsche's ecstatic ruminations we draw only one conclusion: the man-god will know how to destroy.

And when we think today of the author of *Thus Spake Zarathustra* and *Beyond Good and Evil*, an author who, in essence, beckoned us toward *false creativity*, then we cannot but think that this conclusion is embodied in the distortions of the technological civilization of modern capitalism.

Nietzsche's insanity can, of course, be explained purely scientific, medical terms. Ivan Karamazov, however, was not actually ill and yet also ended in insanity. Kirillov in Dostoyevsky's *The Possessed* dreamed of the man-god before Nietzsche did, and, on the eve of his suicide, Kirillov indeed embodied this demonic obsession in his half-delirious, yet intelligible formulas. Claude Eatherly, the American major who took part in the atomic destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, also went insane. It would seem that there is something in man that cannot be denied or even ignored—with impunity.

To his last days Nietzsche's fortunes began and ended with Dostoyevsky's novels. Even Nietzsche's posthumous fate was symbolic: a declining and frustrated Europe looked to him for a teacher. And Nietzsche didn't entirely leave this world—a museum opened in Weimar, where he died. His

writings were published and re-published and the number of works on Nietzsche gradually grew to a whole library. Kierkegaard is the only West European bourgeois philosopher who can compete with Nietzsche in this respect. It is to the credit of the Russian intelligentsia that in the beginning of the twentieth century—while Europe rejoiced in Nietzsche's dithyrambs—Nikolai Fyodorov wrote a number of short articles debunking Nietzsche's philosophy and pointedly calling him "the philosopher of the black kingdom". (Fyodorov, a modest librarian in the Rumyantsev Museum\* in Moscow, was also the teacher of the great K. Tsiolkovsky and V. Chekrygin, an excellent artist.)

Nietzsche shaped the world outlook of entire generations. The best minds of those generations later reappraised his doctrine according to the lessons of history, while the worst set people to hating, killing, starting fires and, when necessary, they themselves burned and killed Nietzsche emancipated those who sought to be free of morality.

When Goebbels spoke with great relish about exterminating millions, he did not bother with philosophical rationalizations. He had a variety of succinct and even lofty formulas about the "master race" and the "magnificence of destroying" at hand. Nietzsche is responsible for fascism to no less an extent than Ivan Karamazov is responsible for Smerdyakov's crime. ("And so it was you who killed him....")

Hitler confidently leaned on the walking stick that the philosopher's sister had given him.

In the early post-war years the West took great pains to dissociate "the philosopher of the black kingdom" from fascism. To resurrect Nietzsche

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\* The Rumyantsev Museum was opened in St. Petersburg in 1831 by Count N. P. Rumyantsev. After his death, the collections and library were moved to Moscow where they were merged with the collections of the Moscow Museum which traditionally was called the Rumyantsev Museum. In the Soviet period, the Rumyantsev library was renamed the Lenin Library.—Ed.

they had to rehabilitate him, to tell the world about his intellectual honesty, his hatred for philistines, about his pure and kind heart. After the summer disturbances of 1968 in Paris, the "leftists" held loud meetings proclaiming that Nietzsche would become the greatest political philosopher of the day. They threw caution to the winds, in contrast to the majority of current researchers and popularizers who try to speak of Nietzsche impartially, outside of politics. The waters of oblivion are shallow. However, despite abstract wording, the tendency of bringing Nietzsche into the present day is becoming more and more obvious.

As Nietzsche battled with insanity, he sent a letter from Turin to Denmark, to Georg Brandes, who had previously lectured on Nietzsche in the United States. "To my friend Georg! After you discovered me, it was no great feat to find me. The problem now is how to lose me...." He signed the letter as he signed all the rest during the first days of his illness: "The Crucified One." (It is curious that before his total mental collapse, his thoughts turned not to the man-god, but the god-man.)

And Nietzsche's intuition was not mistaken, for the world has shown that it does not want to lose him. It would, of course, be absurd to pretend that he never existed. Nietzsche was no Hamlet, Don Juan or Don Quixote. He was a messenger who came running out on the proscenium — lit with dim Christmas lights — and proclaimed, his heart throbbing wildly: "God is dead." And, yearning for a god, he died himself after embarking on a series of blasphemous escapades.

We cannot however speak of Nietzsche today, ignoring the great lessons of history. Nietzsche must be evaluated in the context of the second half of the twentieth century, and not just from a few dusty volumes. A respectful academic attitude would be out of place here and it would also be insincere because an unbiased, objective approach is impossible when one speaks and writes about a



philosopher whose doctrines played into the hands of fascism. Nietzsche's most treasured ideas, the eternal return and the superman, are taken out-of-context by the West; the society of violence and greed, narcotic art and artificial stimulants, militant individualism and cynical indifference, treats Nietzsche as a modern weapon rather than a historical figure. Some persons would attempt to persuade us that he was a child of genius who played with thought as one plays with fire. I will not presume to judge whether Nietzsche was a genius, but surely he was never a *child* of genius—his childhood was marred by the last stages of the decline of culture. And, as far as fire is concerned, a man bears great responsibility for playing with fire—fire is fire. And we must surely agree that playing with ideas is no less dangerous.

Since the history of mankind is obviously not on Nietzsche's side, the apologia for militarism is but an attempt to find a more reliable ally for Nietzsche—science. Don't the discoveries of the past years support what the hermit of Sils-Maria wrote about? He rejected a mechanistic perception of the world and, as it turned out, we do indeed live in a world of probability. He spoke of the catastrophe of existence, and if the cosmos—"this diabolic smithy" is, as modern science tells us, catastrophic, then the catastrophe is an insurmountable phenomenon of the universe. (Here, for some reason, the question that does not come up in whether it is man's mission to create a non-catastrophic world within the catastrophic universe!)

But such argumentation does little to arouse human sympathy. And the reader is told, as if by chance, about the loneliness of this enchanting figure, this tender, kind heart. But can one believe that the modern West is really moved by Nietzsche's intellectual and ethical virtues and that it urges us to bow down before him in disinterested praise of his intuition and spirit? No, he is hardly important to technocracy today simply because his thought in

some way anticipated the development of science or because he was sensitive and pure of heart. Nietzsche is important to technocracy because his philosophy leads high reality to the world of technocracy. Here the technocrats cannot but be impressed by one of his basic theses—that the values of real life are higher than moral and spiritual values. The world, which has set up a technology superior to man, urgently needs such a philosophy, and Nietzsche is important for a civilization whose physiology is the power of technology, technology's domination over the human spirit. (Nietzsche did not realize that if physiological values triumph on earth, life would cease even physiologically. Similarly, the technocrats do not realize that technology will fall when it achieves full domination.) And does the doctrine of will to power not lend legitimacy to the will to technological dominance?

Nietzsche's "aristocratic radicalism" corresponds to the contemporary "technocratic radicalism".

If the *summa technologia* supplants the human, it makes life irrational. If the Dionysian element is to be understood as the orgy of the impersonal, it becomes clear that Nietzsche's worship of the cruel god of wine and merriment cannot but suit the West today. The only difference is that, unlike antiquity, the modern world produces not tragedy, but tragi-comedy and farce. Never has the Dionysian org been more repugnant! In the pre-cybernetics age one could not talk of the Dionysian robot.

Technology heightens the feeling of power and therefore it is assigned the highest rank in Nietzsche's scale of values. When the hermit from Sils-Maria exclaimed, "What is truth?" he then answered that it is the hypothesis accompanied by pleasure, the smallest expenditure of spiritual energy thus over the decades he sent the technocrats a gift, a formula.

One of Nietzsche's aphorisms consoles some of the more broad-minded technocrats: Nietzsche

wrote that truth is a kind of delusion without which a definite species of living beings could not go on living; value is the ultimate basis for life. His formulation of the definite species of living beings refers to humanity; truth, alias delusion, is technological civilization.

The value of life? Nietzsche concluded that the world has no value. Thus, having passed through the tragic and tragic-comic stages of the development of the West, he put forth farce as the genre of the day. It is curious that a thinker whose first work was an apologia for tragedy, wittingly or unwittingly legitimizes farce. But of course "technocratic radicalism" takes no note of this. Like any aristocratic morality that divides men into higher and lower, lord and slave, leader and flock, creative and uncreative—it wishes to appear as serious as possible and, perhaps, even rather élite. Otherwise, technocratic radicalism would be in no position to exploit its inherent tendencies toward domination. And the tendencies are so fantastic that they are presented openly only in science fiction—tendencies toward domination not just of the world, but the universe.

But we shall return to the poor kind soul named Friedrich Nietzsche. One day he went for a walk with a young man who was involved in publishing Nietzsche's works. (Nietzsche was no longer allowed to go out on walks alone.) He saw a little girl on the road, walked over to her and straightened a lock of her hair. Smiling, he said, "Isn't this the embodiment of innocence?" Then he walked back to the hospital, where eventually he died.

But the girl kept on walking, right into the twentieth century. At first she walked along in sandals. Later on she had to go barefoot—her shoes, and those of thousands of boys and girls, were left behind at Auschwitz. But she kept on, and at a still later point she was wearing a pair of light, comfortable shoes. She resumed a confident stride as she made her way along an old stone road.

# ETERNAL MAN

## *Dialogues*



## Justification of the Narrative Form

*"...I'm disturbed by the words: creativity, creative man, joy of creation. I often wonder to whom these words refer. Well, of course, first of all to poets, composers, scholars, i. e., to talented people. But what if I have no talent, am quite ordinary, can enjoy literature and art but can do nothing myself? But after all, I, too, often experience great joy. And not just from books or events. I sit in the drafting room, raise my head, see maples just turning outside the window—and it is as though I had received a gift. After that, I assiduously draw a foundation or plumbing, and the joy gradually fades.... Once I thought, like a fool: if only the white whatman would turn blue or orange at the instant I rejoice, if only something in the world would change."*

This narrative is an attempt at direct communication with readers, whose letters I received after the publication of my books *Are Evil Sorcerers Immortal?* and *Wonder*. I thought at first, not grudging space, to quote passages from these letters and then discuss them in a certain order. But then I began to have doubts about this traditional, epic, severe form of dialogue between two parties. I thought it undemocratic and essentially unjustified. The back of a judge's chair, crowned by a carving of the owl of wisdom, would rise invisibly over the author's head: the author would unwittingly become the court of last appeal. And this would not reflect the true balance of forces: many readers' letters are more meaningful than the pages of my books. It

would be possible, of course, to turn the traditional form inside out: to quote passages from these pages, appending to them readers' meditations. But in this case, the author would have too passive a role. I would like to reflect with my readers anew on what disturbs them today. For this, both sides must speak independently, on an equal footing, and in organic unity.

So I decided to plunge passages from readers' letters into my narrative or—and this is more precise—"countersink" the narrative itself into excerpts from readers' letters.

I wished to begin these reflections with lines from the most naïve letter, on whether the joy of creation is accessible to "the ordinary, untalented individual". I call this letter naïve because, with the half-childish courage of ignorance, it plunges into one of the most complicated philosophical worlds: man—creativity—being. But one might also call this letter wise, for it pulses with that broad understanding of creativity, of its varied spheres, which is, in my opinion, especially vital today. The import of our joint reflections is to make this understanding more profound.

## First Dialogue

### The Wounded Bison

*"...Do you remember how the English scholar Arthur Clarke, in his Profiles of the Future, writes that the miracles of the technology that surrounds us today will seem antediluvian and laughable in 500, perhaps even in 100 years? This shook me when I tried to imagine how supersonic airplanes, ultramodern automobiles and even spaceships will provoke amusement among our great-great-great-grandchildren, similar to what we experience when we see a model or picture of the first steam locomotive. It is indeed easy to believe that these fruits of today's human genius will seem, after three or four centuries, amusing and funny!*

*"And then I asked myself a question that would seem to be unworthy of a third-year student of philosophy. Why doesn't the human face seem amusing or absurd after 500, after 1,000, after many thousands of years? The face of Aeschylus ... Pascal ... Raphael ... Pushkin? The faces of unknown people in the pictures of unknown artists? The peculiarities of artistic canons or the imperfection of a drawing may, of course, sometimes amuse us, but not the substance of life that the painter or sculptor was trying to communicate in the human face."*

In the morning, weighty stacks of foreign newspapers and journals lie on my work table. I go through them, gradually sinking into the pile of papers, which recall a multicolored, thick, rapidly subsiding foam. I read, and by midday it sometimes seems that the air of the small editorial office is so



oversaturated with sensations that "crystals" of strange, fantastic and monster-like images begin to precipitate.

The Italian magazine *Il Tempo* reports laconically on experiments on the artificial preservation of the human brain. *L'Express* develops this theme in more detail: the way to human immortality is to perpetuate, not man's body, but his brain, which can be joined to exceedingly elaborate automata which can put thoughts into action. The same *Il Tempo*, with business-like thoroughness, informs today's world that it is possible to shape the personality of the unborn child by injecting pregnant women with substances that act on chromosomes.

In *Stern*, Dr. Christian Barnard promises to transplant apes' hearts into living men, but at the same time the magazine publishes a magnificently illustrated report on the slaughter of six thousand elephants in Africa. The picture of the slaughter is striking in its ultra-modern figure: "The landscape trampled by elephants recalls territory after an atomic explosion."

*Volksstimme* reports on the ethical and juridical consequences of artificial insemination. In a French clinic, a child was born who was conceived by artificial means. It is possible that at the very moment when obstetricians were leaning over him, in Nevada a hydrogen bomb was exploded underground, a bomb equivalent to one million tons of TNT (I wonder how many elephants it takes to trample a landscape to the point equivalent to the destructive power of this bomb?).

The Swiss weekly *Die Weltwoche* publishes an interview with Alberto Moravia, who visited a number of space centers in the United States. Moravia called the personnel of these centers robots of a new religion, who are losing the taste for life but take the obligations imposed on them quite seriously; they are quite aware of the fact that they have become an inalienable part of a machine which functions completely autonomously.

*U. S. News and World Report* publishes diagrams and lists of gases and bacteria being stored up in the United States.

The flow of information breaks over me like a tidal wave: pulsating galaxies ... dances of the bees ... supersonic trains ... new heart transplants ... plans for conquering the desert (Flaubert's marvelous image flares momentarily: "the desert blooms like a rose") ... large gatherings of marijuana smokers ... avant-garde exhibitions ... computers furnishing horoscopes (at 15 dollars a piece) ... new underground explosions in Nevada ... man's increasing dependence on ever more complex technology ... the deafening noise of cities....

And when I at last pull myself out from under this wave, I take a breath and see elephants.

I see them distinctly and in three dimensions, as the children in Ray Bradbury's *The Veldt* see in the room with the telepathic walls whatever it is they are thinking about: Alice's Wonderland or Africa, the desert, lions. I see elephants as if from a low-flying airplane: they run rapidly about the savanna. Now they will be shot with submachine guns—carefully and rationally, so as not, for heaven's sake, to damage the valuable tusks. And later, when the carcasses are adroitly dressed, there will remain a mountain of formless, bloody innards and photographers from the respectable *Stern* will engrave this affectingly and movingly, somewhat softening the cruel picture with African atmosphere.

To escape this I plunge into a new wave. C. P. Snow declares in *Look* that mankind is threatened not by expanding but by contracting horizons, because human imagination is not blossoming, but fading. Three American magazines inform us that a flight to Mars is planned for 1984; *Paris-Match* writes of the possible use of telepathic contact during space flights if radio contact is broken. An American linguist writes in *The Observer* that the form of the internal organization of man remains,

as before, secret (the language of modern science is marvellous: what was in olden times simply called "the soul" is now oh-so-wisely called "the form of the internal organization..."). The West German physician and sociologist Joachim Bodamer reflects in *Die Zeit* on old traditions irrevocably departed.

I tear myself abruptly from the multi-colored pile of paper. The modern world seems so dissimilar to "worlds past" that a thought has occurred to me today: isn't our era reminiscent of a ship cut adrift? Astern, ever more distant, is a vast shoreline: the history of mankind.

When the "crystals" begin to precipitate out of the sensation-saturated air in my office so thickly that my heart is deprived of oxygen, I go out to a nearby boulevard to breathe a little easier.

Children play on the boulevard, old men sit on the sunny side: the boulevard is a land of old men and children. Fifteen years ago there were fewer old men than children, then their numbers became equal, now there are slightly fewer children.

The boulevards have aged. This is especially noticeable in early autumn, when it is no longer hot and the leaves of linden and poplar trees fall quietly. I love boulevards, they are calming, there is something of eternity in them.

Boulevards are chaste—even in the evening, when the lights go on unbidden and the noise of the trees is like incoherent whispering. And the boulevards are merciful at night, when unrequited love weeps in them.

Yes, the boulevard calms, especially in these quiet afternoon hours. I come up to a girl who, with the point of a delicate stick, is drawing something wavy and alive in the sand. Hills? Waves? The stick breaks, the girl automatically reaches for a new one nearby and extends her line further—seriously, with a slightly frowning face, the way children draw. Trying to understand her thought, I concentrate on these small, begrimed fingers. They are now the only thing in the world that exists for me,

this novelty born under the broken point of a stick. And at last I understood that this is both a cloud and a mountain, both herd of sheep and waves. It is one of those "symbolic" children's drawings in which, with imagination, one can find anything in the world, just as one can hear any voice one wants in the ringing of a bell. I discovered in the wavy, living line of the drawing a "wounded bison"—the brilliant drawing of a prehistoric artist.

I discovered the "wounded bison"—a living, lulling bundle of credulity and pain—so clearly that I almost decided that the girl was drawing just that.

*"...You told in your last letter of the student philosopher, of his theory of 'eternal man'. I read and was envious—of the ease, the painlessness of his belief and of his discovery. This was, or more correctly, is for me now much more painful. Though I am, to use already outmoded terminology, 'in physics' and not 'in lyrics' (I graduated from the physics department of Novosibirsk University), the genuine lyric has never been alien to me: my favourite modern science fiction writer was and remains Bradbury. (Strictly speaking, I first wrote to you not because I especially liked your book, but because of Bradbury—it seemed to me that you interpret him somewhat sentimentally. But I'm not writing about that....) However, even when feeling myself to a certain extent a 'lyricist', I never dreamed that today's technological miracles would seem amusing after five hundred, or even after one hundred years. Antediluvian—without a doubt. But amusing, absurd?! Do the tools of prehistoric man really amuse us? Are sailing ships funny? Your student philosopher is enthralled by Pascal's face, which seems to him (as the image of man's spiritual life) eternal, as distinct, apparently, from the technology or science of that era. Remind him for me of a page from one of Hoffmann's tales. Hoffmann tells how, in the middle of the 17th century, a coach with genuine glass windows astounded Paris—excited crowds lined its path. Pascal,*

too, may have been in this excited throng: the middle of the 17th century was his time. And he may even have put his finger to the glass in the coach's window, not believing in the reality of this miracle. After all, there lived in Pascal the soul of a child, inquisitive and receptive. The face that your student philosopher praises is, even in later portraits, when Pascal was over thirty, the face of a boy genius. One should not forget, either, that Pascal was not only a moral philosopher a 'lyricist'), but also a great mathematician (a 'physicist'). As a man of precise thought, he greatly respected the development of technology and science. Their 'miracles'. Does your student understand this? I have loved and love the miracles around us: the wise laconicism of form in the jet plane tells me no less of modern man than does the music of Shostakovich. Quantum mechanics stimulates the imagination with various 'strangenesses' no less than the work of ultra-modern artists. But that's not what it's all about. I am, no doubt, writing truisms.

"The fact is that my well-balanced world was once given a sharp jolt. I experienced a severe moral shock, the essence of which was so intimate (I am not talking of a break with a woman, but with a man, an old friend from school days), that it would be incongruous to describe it in detail to you, whom I scarcely know. I discovered, behind modern form which, as it seemed to me for many years, was distinguished by prudent laconicism and discrete spirituality, such moral emptiness or, to be frank, the most complete immorality, that I recoiled as if from a stinking grave....

"That's why I say that I envy your philosopher, the painlessness of his belief in man: yesterday's, today's and tomorrow's.

"I went through a difficult time, thought about much, doubted much. And I also developed my own 'theory'—I decided that the world is passing into a new dimension. I will try to explain this with the aid of an historical parallel or, more accurately, hypothesis. You are of course familiar with the theory that, sometime in the antediluvian era, there existed a highly developed civilization—wise beings were able to fly, had discovered

*electricity, even possessed the secrets of the atomic nucleus. Then a world catastrophe, imprinted on the memory of humanity as a deluge, destroyed civilization..and those who remained started over again from scratch.... There is in this theory one thing that is indisputable—a world catastrophe; the rest is, apparently, the play of imagination. Some scholars, including some from my circle, explain the deluge as the result of a large cosmic body that destroyed the equilibrium of the solar system, so that the inclination of the earth's axis changed, the location of the poles shifted suddenly, and a tidal wave arose that flooded untold lands.... So, once, when I was returning home on the highway and an endless flow of rcars was coming at me and airplanes flew above. I thought: may not this new tidal wave inundate those values that seem today eternal? I had in mind precisely what your student philosopher praises in the human face.) Are not the poles again shifting—this time not geographically, but morally? And I was for a long time tormented by these thoughts. I am writing you a confused letter, having calmed down a little, but nevertheless bitterly envying people who can believe in the eternal man joyfully and easily...."*

The girl finished drawing, dropped her stick, raised her hand, with fingers spread, over the drawing, guarding it. And I thought: there is enough of this easy effort, it would seem, to stop the "new tidal wave", because under this small hand—no wider than the leaf of a poplar—there lives the "wounded bison".

When, some decades ago, "bisons" were discovered in the Altamira cave, Spanish and French scholars did not believe that they were drawn by a prehistoric artist. The laconicism of line, the "fluency" of stroke, the succinctness of depiction, the unfettered composition seemed so modern that an international congress in Madrid hastened to declare the drawings a talented forgery—the work of an obscure artist who had stayed, not long before the discovery of the "bisons", at the estate of a rich

Spanish landowner near Altamira. And only when the sensationalism abated, when passions had cooled, and similar bison were found painted in the Combarel cave, into which no modern artist could have gone (for the entrance had been bricked up), did serious efforts to establish the age of the drawings begin: the Magdalenian period (20-12 thousand years B. C.).

The "bisons" have now been studied down to the smallest detail: they have been the subject of thousands of scholarly pages, which note the perfection of the depiction and present various judgments on what inspired the prehistoric artist to draw: excess energy, belief in a magic ritual, an unconscious attempt to study reality around.

Reading about the bison—the trembling of their tense muscles, the resiliency of their short, firm legs—and about the well-developed imagination of the artist, which apparently helped his hand to vividly reproduce stark reality—the animal's heavy flight through the thicket, his bellow, the fury of the pursuing hunters—I have often caught myself thinking that there is in these bison, especially in the most striking—"the wounded bison"—something that has gone unnoticed but is quite essential for comprehending the secrets of their immortality.

In the regal, lowered head, the powerful, childishly helpless, broken paws of the "wounded bison", there is felt the trustfulness of the conquered in the magnanimous victor—the same thing that after thousands of years will astound us in Shakespeare's tragedies. The artist gave the bison new truth and new beauty, the truth and beauty of man himself. His drawings, even of bison filled with strength and determination to fight for their lives, are amazingly uncruel. And is strange that the venerable scholars of art who declared these drawings the work of a contemporary European painter did not see this purely moral content

behind the "modernist" manner. A modernist would have painted cruelly!

The lack of cruelty of the prehistoric artist in depicting stark reality (to live one must kill) conceals a great promise. His work is full of compassion. And this is for me far more important than the "perfection of the drawing" and the "boldness of the large daubs of ochre".

When he finished his work and left the cave, where the fire burned low and hunters, wives and children were already dreaming, primitive night and primitive world surrounded him. *The artist was equal to this world, to its boundlessness and its countless secrets.* He himself was a microcosm and thus — Creative Man.

The night was restless in its ordinary way: the wind whistled, live bisons passed through the thicket. But in this ordinary restlessness of the primitive night one could also hear something new: Michelangelo fashioning stone, Mozart tuning a violin, Pushkin laughing.

*"...Did belief in eternal man come to me easily? I do not now doubt at least one thing: it came completely naturally. It began with Plato's Dialogues. I read them long before I entered the philosophy department, when I was a 16-year-old boy. (I worked at a factory and attended night school.) I understood one thing: two and a half thousand years before me there lived intelligent, good people, able to reflect seriously and, if necessary, to die bravely and beautifully. I read the Dialogues for the second time as a first-year student of philosophy. They were now my 'research topic', and I took them up, not naively and as I had when I was sixteen, but with a student's utilitarianism: I didn't experience them, but studied. After some time, I was again drawn to the Dialogues, and Plato entered my soul. He was no longer outside me (an object of research), but within me. But this was no longer my first, naively integral, boyish perception, for I now understood his wisdom and spiritual*



beauty. I no longer read Plato, but lived one life with him. He was not here and now but beyond my spiritual world. He became a living germ of the eternal man in me. You of course know Marx's formula on the preservation of the wealth of the past as a necessary condition for the return 'of man to himself as a social, i. e., human man'. Awareness of the eternal man within oneself is, therefore, one of the ways to preserve the wealth of the past.

"And this greatly agitates me. If you remember, I wrote my first letter to you because I found in your book the passage: 'If you sat at Socrates' couch and talked with him before he drank the hemlock, if Héloïse wrote you, freethinker and heretic, about love, if horses on Senate Square ran you down, Decembrist, \* if they executed you, Communard, in Paris...'. Yes. Me.

"I, too, think that the only real, supreme stage in the development of humanity is today, because it is imbued, to the greatest possible extent, with the accumulated spiritual and moral experience of generations. If I want to be a present-day man, I must bear within myself the thoughts and feelings of those who loved, fought, despaired, hoped and sacrificed themselves for the future. As you see, according to this artless logic one cannot be a present-day man without being aware of the eternal man within oneself.

"I have written for the second or third time this word 'awareness', but I am not sure of its accuracy. One must build the eternal man in oneself. Yes, build. After all, our spiritual life, too, has a specific architecture...."

I at last tore myself away from the child's drawing in the sand, a drawing in which my imagination discovered the features of "the wounded bison". It was time to return to the office, where a new batch of mail awaited me, and after an hour or two,

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\* *Decembrists*—progressive revolutionary nobles who opposed tsarism with arms on the Senate Square in St. Petersburg in December, 1825.—Ed.

"crystals" with new and strange images would begin to precipitate from the sensation-filled air. I walked along the boulevard, thinking: it only *seems* that it was easier for the artist of the Magdalenian period to stand equal to his world than it is for the modern creative man.

The road of twenty thousand years created not only a new landscape in the world, but also a new landscape in the human soul. It deepened the soul, made it immeasurably more complex, informed it with perceptiveness and capaciousness that allow it to absorb a thousand times more than thousands of years ago.

Yet, *something* has remained unchanged. This something is like a pearl at the bottom of the ocean; standing before the "wounded bison" it does not seem as though thousands of years have passed.

But they have.

Into man's spiritual world have entered the valour of ancient heroes, the love of Abélard and Héloïse, the torments of burned heretics, the asceticism of the builders of gothic cathedrals.

Man's soul has incorporated the courage of Spartacus, the selflessness of the Narodovoltsy (members of the People's Will secret organisation), the greatness of Lenin, the fidelity to duty of Karbyshev and Musa Dzhalil.

Man's spiritual experience includes Oedipus and Faust, Hamlet and Ivan Karamazov.

One of the remarkable features of "the world of man" is that its ethical wealth consists not only of joyful exaltation, hopes and love, but also of doubts resolved, pain that has subsided, memories of sleepless nights, the recognition of mistakes.

*"...My muddled and confused letter now troubles my conscience. The fact is, no doubt, that in my development, mind far outran heart—Achilles left the tortoise far behind. I was an old hand at 'intellectual games', but morally I was helpless. Unfortunately, this is the tragedy*

of many 'physicists'. Paradoxically, the blow to the heart caused the sophisticated intellect to lose its bearings in the search for explanatory 'theories'. So, having completely lost my sense of humor, there arose what I described in my letter to you — a 'theory' of shifting poles and a new tidal wave....

"There really is in the modern world that which some Western philosophers call 'enormous and ugly'. But this, I agree with you, should be understood not in and of itself, but as the overhead expenses of a great hour in history, when mankind is experiencing not the change of an era, but of an age: the face of human society is changing, the face of the planet is changing.

"Today I am much more tolerant of your student philosopher, of his searching for the 'eternal man' in himself. Though, of course, even now I do not agree that in one or five hundred years the miracles of modern technology will seem amusing or funny. Such opinions are also 'overhead'. The world is filled with the varied faces of human genius. In the latter are miraculously combined the rocks of Pheidias and light, dream-like sailing ships. Something poetic has already appeared in my style, as you see....

"In the last few weeks I have become captivated by ancient mythology and the history of art. (By the way, who is your favorite mythological hero? Or, more accurately, which of them is in your opinion most appropriate to the present state of the world?)

"I have just reread Bradbury, and an idea 'dawned' on me that seems foolish enough to be true: what if I were an artist entrusted with illustrating a volume of Bradbury's science fiction stories? I would probably plagiarize shamelessly. I would copy the figures of people and animals from the frescoes of Tibesti, created more than a thousand years ago in the Sahara, before it became a desert. These strangely elongated, light, dancing figures, these fantastically curved necks of giraffes, which seem to have escaped from children's fairy tales!..."

I walked along, wondering: who, in fact, is my favorite hero from ancient mythology? Theseus?

Antaeus? Atlas? Whose image is most suited to the "present state of the world"?

Sisyphus, who in Albert Camus' treatment transcended the world, having understood its absurdity?

No. Hercules, if you will. Yes, the most beloved and bravest of the ancient Greek heroes. But isn't this too childishly optimistic and naïvely traditional: after the tragic, complex, strange Sisyphus to turn to the valorous Hercules, who was able to vanquish the Nemean lion, the Lerneian hydra, to slaughter the Stymphalian birds, to catch the Cyrenaic doe....

Yes, there is such a Hercules, the marvellous comrade of our childhood. But, thinking of present-day humanity, I see before me another, less well-known, and less traditional Hercules.

I see him sitting on the ground, embracing the head of his beloved centaur Chiron, whom he had just a moment ago accidentally wounded with a poisoned arrow. Chiron is dying, and Hercules is powerless to save him. The wise, beloved centaur—an adornment to the world—is dying.

A feeling of great helplessness seized Hercules, a feeling no less strong and deep than the sense of his own might, a sense with which he had lived earlier. And when Chiron died and Hercules rose to his feet and sadly looked around, perhaps the world—in which a thousand miracles can be wrought, but in which you cannot save a beloved being mortally wounded—seemed absurd to him, too. "I do not need the victories over the hydra, over the lion, and those golden apples of the Hesperides, if I have killed Chiron."

The world before him is so young, so primordial-ly fresh, the Universe ignites youthful, red-hot stars.

...Under these stars, the maples turn red in autumn, giving the girl in the drafting room joy that seems to her futile, unneeded by the world.

## Second Dialogue

# The Cup of Hemlock

As a boy of about ten, exploring an attic, I pulled from a pile of dusty, tattered magazines a booklet with binding torn in half and without a beginning. The letters were black on the soft paper, which was almost like tissue and disintegrated under my fingers. I was at the time enthusiastically reading Andersen, so I assumed that this was a book of his.

I took it home, began to read, hoping that any minute now I would enter Andersen's world; I read for an hour, another, understanding nothing, until my head began to ache. But I did not read in vain, for I came to a line that stunned me. "Remember," the unknown man who had written this book addressed me, "you are your own all-powerful sculptor." The line was imprinted on my memory. I felt that it was a secret and a force stirring me to action. Like many other boys, I tried to model things, carved wood, and was already able to test the strength of light, pliable materials. But a sculptor works with stone! And if the book were to be believed, this stone is—myself?! And I was also supposed to be a sculptor?!

I wanted to understand this. That line haunted my imagination no less than Andersen's tales, and this was aided by that forceful definition: all-powerful.

I had to do something to become all-powerful. But what?

Many years later, on a peaceful summer evening in Moscow, the line returned to me in one of the Lenin Library's quiet halls, with windows multi-

colored from the setting sun as if in a cathedral. It returned severe, in dark binding, with a title page on which was printed the name Pico della Mirandola.

I was studying the Italian Renaissance, and the man bearing this name was one of its most fascinating heroes. Even in that epoch so generous in its many-sided talents, he amazed his contemporaries: at ten years, if enthusiastic memoirs are to be believed, he was the first poet and orator in Italy. In early youth, having absorbed an encyclopedic, European education, he wrote and read in twenty-two languages (later, he mastered a few more); philosophy and poetry were joined in him. His works were noted for their sublime thought and belief in man. The church pronounced them heretical. If Mirandola had been born one hundred years earlier or fifty years later, when the Vatican dealt with heretics more decisively, he would quite possibly have been burned. But he lived during decades marked by relative religious tolerance, and *auto da fé* was the lot only of his writings. The poet and thinker removed himself to a castle, where at thirty-one he died, as his biographers write, "from excessive mental strain".

I had earlier read about him, but had never held in my hands the works of Pico della Mirandola himself: I had not been able to find them. And I now held them in the palm of my hand. It seemed to me that I recognized them from childhood.

After an hour, not the slightest doubt remained: in his speech *De Dignitate Hominis* I came across the line: "your own all-powerful sculptor".

In this speech, Mirandola views man as the highest form of being, containing inexhaustible potential for moral and intellectual development. He puts man at the center of the universe and asserts that his greatest good fortune is "to be whatever he wills".

Four hundred and fifty years later, a poet of the mid-twentieth century says the same in a more

down-to-earth way and with a matter-of-fact precision:

Do not let your soul slumber!  
In order not to fan the breeze,  
You must always ply the soul with work  
Both day and night, and night and day!

These two voices—Pico della Mirandola and the Russian poet Nikolai Zabolotsky—have long travelled with me.

*"I am writing this at night. My table is heaped with notebooks, I have overcome 28 essays. My head rings irksomely, like a cracked bell. One tires, I am sure, not from an overabundance of information, but from a lack of variety. If it weren't for differences in handwriting, one might think that this ... and this ... and this ... were written by a single boy or a single girl. Yet if you don't have something that is yours and yours alone, like Pushkin's Tatyana, the heroine of the essays, then you have not yet sensed, have not become aware of your own ego. Only an individual can understand another individual. I think it was Pascal who said that the more original the person, the more originality he sees in those around him. God, how unoriginal Tatyana is in the majority of essays, she who was a mystery for generations of thinking people. I write this with a sense of my own guilt. If a boy or girl (and they are already fourteen or fifteen) is not sufficiently stirred to perceive his or her own ego, his own uniqueness, and the need to understand and see as no one else understands and sees (it is beside the point that this is often an illusion), then it is time for the teacher to wonder whether he himself is an individual.*

*"During the day, of course, there is no time to doubt or philosophize—classes, teachers' meetings, talks with parents. While at night, when the town outside the window drops off to sleep and you are left alone with yourself, one is overcome with varied, at times strange thoughts.*

"Konstantin Paustovsky dreamed of writing a book about the life that existed only in his desires and imagination, a book about a second life that 'did not appear' in reality. In this second biography, he could have made friends with Blok, though in fact he never saw Blok. If I were a writer, I would dare to create something even more fantastic: some evening I would gather my favorite heroes from different centuries and different lands in an inn or hostelry. And they would not only avidly discuss good and beauty, but would also act. I would like Cervantes to draw his sword in defence of Jan Hus, escaping from the underground dungeon of Constance. Yet would Hus flee, or would he remain in prison, like Socrates, in order to be true to his ideas and to himself? But as Socrates drank his cup of hemlock, couldn't he have stood, in this fantastic book, alongside Thomas More? There are events that are natural to explain in hindsight.

"This is, of course, a 'game of the mind'. I am ironic about it in the morning. I understand perfectly that I am not a writer, but a teacher of literature, and must take up more modest projects. I would like (and this is serious) to compile an Anthology of selections from the prison writings of various notable people from different epochs. From Socrates (he, to be sure, did not write, so I would include reminiscences about him) to Chernyshevsky, Dzerzhinsky, right up to the Second World War: Fučik and Džhalil. Such a book would help the young reader to become aware of the grandeur of the moral task: to remain, despite everything, oneself. It might even teach this. Believe me, I am not thinking in terms of editions or large printings. It would suit me if our school had only one copy of this Anthology, copied out by hand by my girls and boys. Yes, by hand. It would go more to the heart. Sometimes, during class, I even mentally share out the assignment. 'You, Yura, write out Thomas More's letter to his daughter in Chelsea from the Tower and selections from his Utopia. Victor—the last letter of Jan Hus. Lida—a page from Campanella's Civitas Solis. Sergei, we'll give you selections from the first part of Don Quixote. And Masha, the letters of the Decembrist Lunin.'



*"I try not to forget anyone: neither boys nor girls nor great men.*

*"And this is where we need your help. (As you see, fantasy is fantasy, yet the letter does have its purely utilitarian purpose!) Memory suggests a name, half forgotten, from my student years: Boethius. A Roman philosopher of the beginning of the 6th century, he was thrown in a dungeon by King Theodoric, then executed. While awaiting execution, Boethius wrote De Consolatione Philosophiae. I don't remember anything else.... Has this been translated into Russian? Can one at least get excerpts? Or an outline of its basic ideas? Neither in our district nor in the regional libraries, and I have written them, is there a trace of Boethius. It would no doubt be easier for you in Moscow...."*

Once more, I set off for the Lenin Library, and search, read, and think, resurrecting the miracle of distant, half-forgotten fate. Boethius lived and wrote almost fifteen centuries ago. Rome had already burned more than once, the Alexandrian library had burned down, fanatics had already lynched Hypatia—an outstanding woman, who had dedicated herself to philosophy and mathematics in a savage age. (As Gibbon writes, "...her flesh was scraped from her bones with sharp oyster-shells.") The depositories of art had already been plundered; Goths, Ostrogoths, Vandals, Huns were trampling the sinoking debris of a great, ancient civilization.

In this wasted, dehumanized world, filled with superstition and cruelty, rare oases persisted—the estates of Roman aristocrats, where priceless manuscripts were preserved, Aristotle was read, Pythagorus, Plato and Plotinus discussed. But it was dangerous to set out from the estate—Ostrogoth soldiers murdered. And the roads themselves were dying: there was neither trade nor postal service, the world was falling apart, life was bounded by narrow limits.

It was in this world that the Roman philosopher Boethius lived.

We know that he was the Senator-Minister of the Ostrogoth King of Italy, Theodoric, was later accused of conspiracy, and shut in a tower in Pavia. And executed.

Awaiting execution, Boethius wrote *De Consolatione Philosophiae*—an exalted narrative of the riches of the human soul. In this work, he ventured a thought that Spinoza, a thousand years later, informed with the precision and poignancy of an aphorism: "Blessedness is not the reward of virtue, but virtue itself." Developing this thought, Boethius asserts that any man can become a god. And this was written in the first centuries when Christianity was the official religion. So far as I know, no historian has been able to establish whether Boethius really participated in a political conspiracy, but the fact that he was executed by King Theodoric "for services rendered" is beyond dispute. They could not but execute him in an era when women mathematicians were lynched and ancient marble smashed.

*De Consolatione Philosophiae* was filled with stately wisdom that makes it the equal of Socrates' last talks with his friends before he drank the cup of hemlock. Boethius believes, despite all, in the harmony of the world, in the wisdom of the "foundations of being". He speaks a *metaphysical* "yes" to life. And this "yes" is astounding when put in the context of Boethius' era.

The very nature of the execution that Theodoric chose for Boethius shows clearly the feelings that the King of Italy nourished toward human intellect: the executioners tied a crude rope around the philosopher's head and tightened it until, blinded by pain, he died. It is worth noting that historians judge Theodoric the most complaisant king of that era.

Half of Boethius' work is in verse. He intended this to be the voice of philosophy itself, and

philosophy affirms the highest truth of "creations", "which for desires of good do move back to the springs from whence they first did fall".

Yes, astounding....

But what is no doubt most astounding is that, almost fifteen centuries later, a teacher has visions of him at night.

Man wants to take in the fullness of the world. Not the vanity, but the fullness. At night, the universe acquires clarity. Infinity takes on the outline of a star-filled, perceptible reality. At night one can talk with Sirius and Sophocles.

Moral law no doubt celebrates a victory when even the night sky is found "within me". And I experience the miracle of the universe, as in childhood I experienced the miracle of trees, brooks and hills. It expands my heart, I am made fuller in myself. Moral law celebrates victory because man, having perceived the universe in himself, having perceived himself as the universe, wants to understand the foundations of being, poses the question of the meaning of life. When we say, "Antigone, Faust, Hamlet, Andrei Bolkon-sky—these are worlds", we have just this in mind.

*"An hour ago I returned from the theater. Antigone was playing. No, not Sophocles', but the Antigone of our contemporary—Jean Anouilh. I had long heard of it, so now that I have seen it I am writing to you, filled with doubt. On the way back from the theater I discussed the play with friends, and it turned out that we understood it differently. They laughed at and stigmatized my ideas, and I was isolated. When I was defending myself, I was sure, but now....*

*"I understood neither the heart nor the mind for what Antigone goes off to die. I was with her when, having broken Créon's order, she sprinkled Polynice's body with earth, when she was tender and determined with Hémon who loved her. I was with her till the moment when they took from her the faith in what she had earlier believed.*

And it turned out that there was nothing more for her to believe in! So, believing in nothing, she goes off to die. I wanted to stop her, I wanted, like a girl in a children's theater, to cry out: don't leave, don't cross the line, live! Love Hémon, bear him a son, try to regain faith in the world or at least, like Natasha Rostova, find consolation in domestic joys. Live! After all, it turned out that Polynice, for whom you risked your life, and Étéocle, are not brothers one can be proud of, but mean nonentities, and it's not even known who was buried with a hero's honors and who was left to rot in the sun like a dog. You yourself don't believe in the ritual of the burial service, and the last man whom you will see in life, a guard, doesn't understand you, as you don't understand him, and your sacrifice is needed neither by the living nor the dead. Stay! There was a moment when I was even on Créon's side, so persuasively did he urge Antigone to live and show her the senselessness of her decision. And it was especially for this that my companions fell on me the way back from the theater. Fine, I tried to justify myself, I repent that moment, but show me the moral value of her decision to die. And they repeated endlessly that it was impossible to understand this moral value from the point of view of everyday logic. 'You have been raised to believe,' one of them said, 'that you can die only for a great idea or for mankind. But Anouilh's Antigone died to remain true to herself.'—'But is it really possible to be true to yourself without regaining faith in mankind and the idea? Will you really not lose yourself in complete unbelief?'—so I said. 'In complete unbelief, there is only one way to remain true to yourself: to die!'—so they said. 'To die for what?'—'For yourself!'—'For what in yourself?'—'You don't understand,' explained one of my companions, a young, gifted, thirty-year-old scholar, 'that in hopeless situations, even this decision may be a rebellion. A rebellion by the individual, who rejects life if it does not correspond to his ideals.' But my God, how childishly defenseless Antigone looked when she went to her death. Is this a rebel? It's too bad that I have only a confused memory of Sophocles and don't have him to reread. Maybe if I had him I wouldn't be writing you...."

As opposed to Anouilh's heroine, Sophocles' Antigone believes in Polynice to the last, and she tries to bury him despite the strictest ban by Créon, she believes in the burial ritual and in the gods. And Sophocles' Créon does not urge Antigone to live, love and bear a son. He sends her to her martyr's death sternly, inexorably, without hesitation.

But Sophocles' Antigone dies not only for Polynice and the gods, whose laws she was carrying out. She dies, too, for herself, to remain true to herself.

Two and a half millennia ago this tragedy played in a theater that it is difficult for modern man to imagine: a giant stone amphitheater on the side of the Acropolis hill descended to the spot where Man and Fate duelled. This was in legendary Athens. Antigone emerged victorious in the struggle against tragic forces. She died for her ideals. For love. So that nothing in the world would keep man from loving. For conscience—so that nothing in the world would prevent man from following his conscience. She remained true to herself, because she could not but die for her ideals.

Anouilh's Antigone remained true to herself because she could not live without ideals.

The two Antigones are separated by an abyss.

When you read the tragic story of the daughter of Oedipus, King of Thebes, in the sharply modern, anguished version of the contemporary French dramatist, it is as though you are listening to one of Bach's fugues performed by talented jazz musicians. The synthesis falls apart. The amphora has fallen from our hands and broken. In the fragments, one painfully recognizes fragments of an integral image.

I know no few lovers of "jazzed-up Bach", but I personally prefer the organ. Bach in the eighteenth century did not become a part of human eternity so that he could be dragged down in the decades when the forms of bourgeois society disintegrate. And if

one understands contemporaneity broadly, isn't the genuine Bach of the organ more contemporary?

Reading Anouilh's tragedy, I kept thinking that for Antigone the death to which she goes is, in effect, a form of suicide. She says "no" not to specific tragic forces, but to the foundations of being, "no"—to the "sublunary world", in which any feeling or action is doomed to fail, and where even at sunlit noon banality follows man like a shadow; a "no" to an order in which nothing can be changed. This Antigone speaks a *metaphysical* "no" to the world.

But a moment before her execution-suicide, she understands or begins to understand: to die without a purpose is no better than to live without a purpose.

In Anouilh's *Antigone*, the mute image of guards playing cards rules. We can see or not see them, they rule invisibly. Antigone is left alone with one of them before her death. These are moments of the fullest and most bitter loneliness.

The guards play cards. Philosophers go to their death and rise again. Prisons collapse and are rebuilt. Tyrants die and are born. The centuries flow by. But the guards play cards.

One can picture a dialogue between the two Antigones, Sophocles' and Anouilh's.

*Anouilh's Antigone.* Do you know that they have been playing cards for two and a half millennia, without tiring. From your time to mine.

*Sophocles' Antigone.* But didn't you notice glints of fire on their cards?

*Anouilh's Antigone.* Fire? What are you talking about?

*Sophocles' Antigone.* About a relay with a torch. Through those two and a half millennia.

*Anouilh's Antigone.* So you think that glints of fire make the cards prettier.

*Sophocles' Antigone.* They make the cards' decrepitude apparent. The cards have frayed in those two and a half millennia. They have grown old.

*Anouilh's Antigone.* And your fire?...

*Sophocles' Antigone.* Fire is not subject to the millennia. It remains young.

The tragic difference between this relay with a torch through two and a half millennia and the triumphantly joyful race in Athens is that the torch has often been *alive*. Jan Hus was already on the pyre when, before lighting the straw, they for the last time demanded of him a renunciation, promising his life in return. He answered: "No!"

"No"—so Thomas More answered, too. And Giordano Bruno. And thousands of unknown rebels, mutineers and heretics have answered "no" to inquisitors, kings, executioners. "No"—not to the world; but to the inhuman forces in the world. This "no" is perhaps the greatest thing in the "phenomenon of man". It is easier to part with life than with conscience. Because conscience is mankind within you. Renouncing it, you renounce immortality.

The history of the human spirit, of human self-consciousness, is full of ethical greatness. A relay through millennia.... Fire stolen from the gods has itself become divine.

In everyday life, the glints of fire are sometimes scarcely perceptible. But look closely—and at yourself, too.

*"Thank you for Boethius and Pico della Mirandola. I am sending you a modest story about the retired postal clerk Hencke. I copied it for you from an old astronomy journal, supposing in my naïvety that you have not read about this amazing man before. So we have exchanged gifts. One fate for another.*

*"My heart is troubled. I am writing this, as usual, at night. I should be sleeping. Tomorrow is a difficult day. I've been summoned to the criminal department. Would you believe, two of my boys have been arrested. With toy pistols (bought in a children's store), they held up and robbed women and old people, took their hats and money.*

*They claim it was a game. But then they drank wine and bought presents for girls with what they had stolen. I believe I have already written you about one of them, Yura, or rather mentioned him as the one to whom Thomas More's letter to his daughter would be entrusted for my Anthology.*

*"It's hard for me, I am afraid I'm losing heart. To make matters worse, a week before these two were arrested, Masha ran away from home and school. Love. She is a little older than the others, because she was sick as a child and had to repeat 3rd and 5th grades. My fourteen-year-old girls experience this romantic flight as a supreme event, they haven't time for lessons, let alone for my Anthology. And is it necessary, this Anthology? One can copy out by hand selections from Campanella or Chernyshevsky, one may note in a smaller hand that it was written at a certain time, in a certain fortress. Is there any great benefit in this if the heart doesn't take part? Surely I must not have found the way to their hearts. Thank you for Boethius, but this enterprise with an Anthology of writings from prison now seems infantile to me. At night I think up quixotic dabbings in pedagogy.*

*"Today she writes out the letters of the Decembrist Lunin, tomorrow she will forget Lunin, school and me, will run away, taking with herself a pair of fashionable shoes. I am abasing myself, repeating that at thirty years of age it is time to be a sober realist; I look in the mirror and laugh at my own romantically tousled hair. In general, I am probably playing the fool.*

*"If in the morning I find the strength to say 'no, no and no' to this mood, you won't receive my letter...."*

I had, of course, read earlier about the retired postal clerk Hencke, a man of amazing patience.

It was the beginning of the nineteenth century. Little is known of Hencke: having retired from the postal service, he dedicated himself to astronomy, with which he had earlier occupied his leisure, and he decided to discover a small, fifth planet that, according to the calculations of mathematicians,



should have been between Mars and Jupiter. For fifteen years, night after night, not losing heart from failure, he sought that mysterious planet, and at last found it. For fifteen years, he spent the nights alone with the sky. Approximately five and a half thousand nights. And on none of them did he desist from his observing.

A monotonous, sleepless life?

The fullness of life is measured not by an abundance of events, but by its moral content. The heroes of American science fiction obtain in one minute more variety than did Hencke in a decade, but their existence is poorer spiritually. And it's not because the retired postal clerk made a discovery, for this is often not the case.

If Hencke had found nothing, the scientific value of his observations would, of course, have been incomparably less. But would this have changed the ethical value of his life?...

*"I am again writing you after returning from the theater. Chekhov this time—a staging of his short novel My Life. While we were returning, my companions avidly discussed what we had seen, but I was thinking that man can leave himself to the world. Not a scientific discovery, about which my comrades dream endlessly, but himself. A human life can have great value in and of itself if it is permeated with spiritual content—with love, sincerity, fidelity and other such fine things. I finally gave voice to this thought, and one of the young people asked me a question remarkably similar to the question that you asked yourself (do you remember?) in the Hermitage when you stood before Rembrandt's 'Portrait d'un vieux juif'. 'If,' he tried to pry out of me, 'Chekhov hadn't written this novel, what would we know of its hero who would have left nothing to the world but himself? What role would he play in our life today?' I answered that one cannot invent a man, only see him, and Chekhov did not invent, but saw the hero of the tale. If he hadn't written, there would be one less remarkable tale, but there*

wouldn't be one less spiritually rich individual, a 'self-illuminating concentration'. It would be preserved in children and grandchildren. I spoke, of course, more disjointedly than I am now speaking, and I am afraid that they didn't understand a thing. When we reached my house, they bade farewell condescendingly: 'See you in the morning, self-illuminating personality.'

"But that's not all. When I first wrote you about your 'Vieux juif', I was much less sure of these ideas than I am today. At that time, the assertion that we leave behind us not only railroads, books, cities and intelligent machines, but also our personality, a 'self-illuminating concentration', provoked some doubts that I shared with you. I both agreed and disagreed with this assertion. A personality not embodied in something real seemed to me somewhat like a dream or a mirage. I probably took this realness somewhat naïvely. Scientific discoveries, an artistic canvas, etc. Antigone (Sophocles) discovered nothing and painted nothing, and yet her spiritual fate lasted much longer than her physical life, she remained true to herself despite everything. This, too, is reality?!

"A curious boy lives in our building. He is sixteen, he writes verse and stories, but he shows them only to his mother (they live alone). In the morning, we usually leave the building at the same time—he to school, I to work. On the way, we talk about life, he sometimes asks amazing questions. For example, yesterday he related that on Sunday he had been to the museum and stood long before a picture by Borovikovsky, depicting a young, tender maiden (apparently, eighteenth century) in something white and airy. He stood and thought: where is she now? This boy looked me in the face, seriously, screwed up his eyes as though looking at a picture, and, without smiling, asked: 'Where will you be after two hundred years?' And I didn't have the sense of humor to respond jocularly. Perhaps he will write to you? My cousin is fifteen, and when I am at their home he and his friends often ask me crazy questions, too.

"I have no doubt at all that the visionary teacher about whom you wrote me will again find faith in his boys and compile his Anthology."

Marx once noted with sober precision: man cannot again become a child without falling into childishness. "But does the naïvety of a child really not overjoy him," he wrote further, "and should he really not try to reproduce his true essence on a higher plane?"

This is relevant both to mankind and to the individual. The meaning of working on oneself spiritually is in reproducing one's true essence on a higher plane. For this, one must be less forgetful of what one was, and what went before.

We admire artists who reveal spirituality, humanity, beauty. But aren't we all obliged to discover this in ourselves, to discover and develop it?

*"Lyusia has long urged me to write you, but there was no occasion. Send my literary efforts? But I myself feel their immaturity, so for the time being I read them only to my mother. But I have decided to write at last, since I learned from Lyusia that she has written you about me. And to obtain information at second hand is offensive, I can judge that from my own experience.*

*"The world of human feelings seems to me endlessly mighty. This might is for us quite perceptibly embodied in literature and art, which for just that reason provide great delight. But like you, I believe that an age is approaching when we will see our feelings take on miraculous, material force. I believe this because I sometimes feel a joy that would suffice to provide energy for a spaceship. So you lie at night in the darkness and think: there was joy in the morning, now there is none, and not a single ship has lifted into the sky....*

*"And then you think about feelings that others experienced who lived before you. They were amazed, overjoyed, they loved. Then they died, and where did this treasure go?"*

Young man, it went nowhere. It is with you still. If it had left, your night would not be sleepless.

Hours when one is alone with oneself are great, creative hours if they are filled with meditations on life. The formula, "the creative individual", is in effect a tautology. An individual cannot be *uncreative*: he leaves himself to the world, even if he has not written a novel, has not made a discovery. He shows his own nature in human intercourse, love, the search for truth.

The title of this chapter, "The Cup of Hemlock", should be understood as an image of truth to self, to social and ethical ideals. The "no" that man says rarely lasts centuries, as did the "no" of Hus and More. More often, it is heard only by family or friends. And it may be heard by no one, if this "no" is said to oneself after a night filled with doubts. But to be unheard is not to be without trace.

Because "I" does not exist without "thou". This is what the rest of this narrative will be about, the great task that the individual faces: the alteration of the world, the creativity of life.

## Third Dialogue

### Petrarch's Letters

As a youth, after the war, like many of my peers, I went through a period of maniac enthusiasm over the Hermitage in Leningrad and the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow. In the mornings I plunged into quiet halls with the dark, dully glimmering patches of pictures, lost my head and was amazed by how quickly the hours passed when I was reminded that it was already evening and time to leave.

Then I began to feel at home among pictures and began to make various discoveries. Once, viewing Picasso's "Les deux Saltimbanques", I noticed that one of the jugglers was quite similar to Pheidias' "Athena". Yes, in front of me was Zeus' favorite daughter—somewhat older, exhausted—and I thought that the millennia had treated her, who at one time commanded the fates of towns and heroes, mercilessly. Angular, with a strained, indifferent face, this juggler at a small café table resembled the victoriously young goddess of the *Iliad* the way that Monet's "Etude de la cathédrale de Rouen (Midi)"—a balanced mass of melted gold—resembled "Etude de la cathédrale de Rouen (Soir)". The same cathedral, distorted by sharp, lilac bands, lost on the canvas not only balance, but even stability; it looks ready to fall before the next noon. Such minor discoveries were, no doubt, the result of an unconscious desire to see beyond the canvas more of what the artist was saying directly: change—from one age to the next—in emotional states, complication of the

human spirit, the history of the development of characters and types. The strong faces of the men of the Renaissance came to life in the stone of Rodin, but this stone, as distinct from the serenely stern or good-naturedly cruel images of ancient canvases, suffered and thought.

It seemed to me then that Van Dyck's Antwerp doctor Markysus loved Rubens' lady's maid; when I left the Hermitage in the evenings, he visited her in the neighboring hall, and morning caught him on a sigh of barely concealed irony, of an explanation tormenting to both—hence this childish graceful turn of the head, stopped in mid-sentence, and the entreaty of the half-opened palm.

I do not think it worth wearying the reader further with the tale of how the perception of fragility and momentariness of happiness on Watteau's canvases was joined with an experience of the white nights, while women in English portraits of the eighteenth century seemed beings from another planet. That is not the heart of the matter. What is important is that I once made a discovery that I take seriously even today: I found that paintings could be divided into those that *talk* and those that *listen*. The most talkative were the clear and powerful works of Poussin, the most attentive—the canvases of Rembrandt. I could go to any of them and be seized by the feeling that they were listening to me.

This feeling was so real that after a minute I no longer believed I was standing silently in front of a picture. The picture was focused on me to such an extent that it did not even require me to talk; mute, disinterested understanding asserted itself as one of the highest forms of human intercourse.

His old men, biblical heroes, young women, clothiers, doctors, old women, and in his sketches—beggars, trees, roads—Rembrandt's whole world wants but one thing: to listen to you. This is especially striking in its contrast to the fashionable modern art of the West. An art critic

who has studied the Swedish film director, Ingmar Bergman, made a very precise observation: Bergman's camera follows the person speaking, only rarely the person listening.

Bergman's heroes know only how to speak, to speak in a vacuum called today incommunicability. They have only four senses; the fifth—hearing—though preserved physically has atrophied morally. The road of the West European man—from Rembrandt to Bergman—is a road on which one of the most valuable gifts of the human world has been lost: the gift of human intercourse.

The heroes in Bergman's films are alone, cut off from the world, and unhappy. From the standpoint of the logic of human behavior, they behave enigmatically: they yearn for understanding and tenderness but do not see or feel it when it is right next to them, fear pain but desperately rush to meet it. The clue is that most of Bergman's heroes are not individuals but animated objects.

More than a hundred years ago, the thinker Sören Kierkegaard, stated that "want of a soul is also mental illness". Bergman's films show a new form of derangement: the disintegration of the personality during the last summer lightning of the soul that understands this but does not want to understand. One of the heroes of *Wild Strawberries*, young Borg, enjoys loneliness as a sick, perverted man enjoys masochism.

In *Wild Strawberries*, too, an old and solitary Borg has a dream. In first light of day ... denuded, empty streets ... large clocks without hands over a deserted shop ... an ancient, horse-drawn catafalque... emaciated horses, drawing the funeral coach, seem to be the only living beings in the mute, black and white world. When the catafalque falls apart and the horses run away, Borg leans over the slowly rising deceased and recognizes himself.

In this dream is the folly of solitude: if the only possible form of human intercourse is with oneself,

then some early morning one risks coming face to face with the deceased and recognizing oneself.

The streets along which the old Borg walks in his dream are both similar and dissimilar to real streets. The ashy light and the dead quiet give them something fantastically moonlike. This is not the "world of people" and the world of man, this is the world *after* man, world that has lost its sunny nature, on which neither trees rustle nor children play. In the image of a town with street clocks without hands, the evil of loneliness is laid mercilessly bare. It is revealed as *nonexistence*. This is the philosophical content of the old Borg's dream.

After Bergman, it is gratifying to return to Rembrandt, to his old men and trees. Earlier, it seemed to me that Rembrandt's canvases told of loneliness, that the comfortable pictures of his less talented contemporaries—the "little Hollanders", with their carousings, domestic concerts, amorous pleasures—of warm human community. The fact was, probably, that I had viewed these small pictures from afar, so that I had felt their general atmosphere but had not really seen the faces of the people depicted in them. Rembrandt shows man, they—transitory events in life. People have a good time, dry their boots by the fire, play cards, make music. And this makes one happy until one sees the *faces*. The faces kill the joy: they are filled with the self-satisfaction and indifference of good burghers. There is in them something of the thick walls of a comfortable house, behind which one can forget beggars and homeless, lonely old men and women. Would they have sat the penniless and "immoral" artist Rembrandt at the table in this home? And what is more human: the solitude of the heroes of Rembrandt's canvases or the blasé socializing of petty, merry-making bourgeoisie?

Most probably, there are different sorts of solitude and different sorts of socializing. What do the solitude of Borg and the solitude of the "Portrait d'un vieillard en rouge", which you



recognize as alive within yourself after three hundred years?

Man as a thinking being, as a personality, contains within himself a more or less ponderable plus—"I plus humanity". It is this, and not apparent, superficial forms, that determines the substance of his intercourse with other people, with the world.

*"To the man who thinks in modern terms, much of what you write is laughable. Just as some enraptured young girls exclaim: 'Ah, Bach!' 'Ah, the organ!', you exclaim between the lines of your books, 'Ah, Socrates!' 'Ah, Cicero!', 'Ah, wise, expansive letters!' Be frank for once and write, not between the lines, but directly, that you would like to sit of an evening by the fire-place in the living room and talk with your dear friends of Schiller, of glory, of love—with the window shut tight to keep out the repulsive roar of automobiles or, for heaven's sake, airplanes. Alas, there are now neither the antique porticos beloved by wise men, nor coaches brimming with charming letters, nor even living rooms with genuine fireplaces, only teletypes, radios, telephones, newspapers, television and suchlike details of the electronic age. In toto, they serve as a sort of gigantic, world-wide nervous system, like the one that supports the restless, vital activity of my body or yours. And the tragedy is not that the old, local forms of human intercourse have died a natural death. Our tragedy is much greater, and we will feel it in full force tomorrow: these forms no longer have a place in life, yet the mechanisms of this private social intercourse persist and will for a long time function within us—and these mechanisms do not accord with the new world, with the new situation that ensues from the development of the 'world nervous system'.*

*"Since olden times, from the primitive stage of society, every new technology has broadened man: the stone axe (instead of hands), the house (instead of hides), radio (instead of the voice). But while in the past every new technology was a closed system, i. e., acted in isolation*

from all the rest, today a new situation has developed: the systems have united into the above-mentioned gigantic nervous system of humanity, they no longer exist in and of themselves, but coexist. Feet, hands, ears, consciousness (computers) have 'expanded' simultaneously—not to mention the reatest gift, the ability to see the world, from the cosmonaut in flight to the hunting of sharks off the shores of Japan.

"And these new capabilities, these 'expansions' exist, I repeat, simultaneously, creating in effect a new structure of human existence; tomorrow, even within our own lifetime, the transmission of thoughts over a distance will probably be a reality, which will make the structure even richer and more complex.

"The man of the era of 'candle and coach', so attractive to you, communicated with his fellows in two ways: speech and letters. To you he seems rich, to me poor! I see, hear, feel, I perceive and experience reality more completely. Of course, this is not in itself a universal key to reality, but it does give us hope that such a universal key is possible.

"The mechanisms of private social intercourse, mechanisms that function within us because of inertia, prevent us from becoming distinctly aware of and giving credence to the new situation. You sit with others (perhaps your wife) in front of the television, an African boy from a fantastically distant village almost touches you with his hands, and, observing him—yes, observing!—you discuss the chances of promotion at work or whether or not you should buy a new rug. You are neither with that boy, nor with your company, you are not even with yourself! You have dropped out of the structure of the contemporary world and, drowsing off, loftily and mournfully ponder the crisis of social intercourse.

"But look at history, and you will see that such crises have been experienced in all transitional ages by those who have dropped out of the new structure of the world. As a philologist and linguist, I know this well. Take Shakespeare's time: when one reads the plays of his contemporaries it seems that the action unfolds not on Earth, but on the mute, desolate Moon. (This, if you please, is much like the films of our contemporary, the

Swede Bergman.) Cold, solitary people, isolated from humankind, collide purely mechanically, like billiard balls. Yet *Romeo and Juliet*, *Twelfth Night*, *Much Ado about Nothing*, and *Othello* were written in the same decades! In Shakespeare's time, man moved from the bed cupboard (in which young apprentices made themselves comfortable for the night) into a world that was unknown and full of danger and unforeseen possibilities. And the artist who did not shrink from this world, but looked it courageously in the face, wrote *Merry Wives of Windsor* and *Hamlet*. One of his heroes says: '... thou met'st with things dying, I with things new born.' Even in his most austere tragedies, man cannot live without fellow man: the souls of his heroes are open to the new world, and this new world can be mastered only together with one's beloved or a dear friend.

"Those of Shakespeare's contemporaries who bemoaned the stuffy bed cupboard and shrank from the new world wrote purely Bergmanesque things.

"Might it be that the antique porticos, living rooms with fire-places and postal coaches for which, it seems to me, you yearn are variations on the bed cupboard?

"I write this wishing you well, I would like to see in you a man of modern thought. But, to be frank, I don't really count on success. I think that, when you have read through my letter, you will lay it aside, forget, and bury yourself in your beloved letters of Cicero, Abélard, Petrarch...."

Apologists for today's modernist painting often say that their favorite artists picture reality as it is seen from an airplane, a speeding car or through a magnifying glass.

Imagine that in a city of the future there opens, for purely informational purposes, an exhibition of modernist artists of the mid-twentieth century. Imagine further that a man wishing to see this century as it was, in its true guise, approaches pictures that show reality as it appears from the windows of a speeding car.

I am afraid that, even with a patient and experienced guide, he will not be able to understand why the artist depicted so distorted and eroded a "reality". He will not recognize this reality, and will then decide that it does not exist now nor did it exist earlier: this was not seen by man, but by an automobile, or, more precisely, by a "centaur" consisting of man and automobile. Since art reproduces human reality, the picture at the exhibition is unreal. And the man will be drawn to the good old museum, to Rembrandt's canvases, which illuminate the truth about man.

Airplane, automobile, lens—these are all man's *instruments*. Telephone, radio, television—these, too, are instruments. This is the boon of technology—of the scientific and technological revolution that we are going through: an abundance of valuable, intelligent instruments *in the service of man* multiplies and expands his forces, frees them for the cognition and remaking of the world.

If we are to believe the well-known Canadian sociologist, Marshall McLuhan, and the adherents of his theory of the mass media, very popular in the West, any invention that expands our potential, be it automobile or television, not only serves man but also determines what he is. Driving an automobile, say McLuhan's followers, man in a certain sense amputates his legs. McLuhan and his adherents do not say what man amputates when he spends endless hours watching television, but, following their logic, this "amputation" is even more serious than the loss of both legs.

Since the stone age, if McLuhan is to be believed, it is not man that commands instruments, but instruments man. McLuhan endlessly reiterates that instruments today, especially the mass media, have become fantastically powerful. So it is vitally important to understand the new world and one's place in it.

McLuhan's "new world" has a number of quite distinctive features. One of them involves the

dominance of form over content. This is a completely logical extension of the dominance of instruments over man. What is being shown on television plays no role at all. The television broadcast in and of itself, without the least dependence on its content, is *communication*, which reorganizes your feelings, forms a new perception of reality (very much, we would add, like that of a speeding automobile), i. e., it makes you a "new man" who worships oral discussion and is indifferent to letters.

Poor letters! We have been burying them for almost one hundred years. The French historian Gaston Boissier, on the eve of the twentieth century, feared that the telegraph would replace the post and that this "rapid-fire ordnance" would kill intimate correspondence. If this honorable scholar had foreseen the telephone, it is to be supposed that his mood would not have been any more optimistic.

Yet today, the videotelephone is expected at any minute, and letters show no wish to die! They live because man's need to meditate, suffer and experience with others lives and will never fade. "Mass media" possess indisputable power, yet letters will live because in human intercourse, whatever McLuhan asserts, content dominates form.

Of course, there have been epochs when letters played a greater role in human life than they do now. Petrarch's epoch was one of these.

The letters that the great poet sent from Avignon to Florence were major events for those to whom they were addressed. The recipient assembled guests, organized a dinner, and then the letter was read—dessert "of a high tone", as one investigator of that epoch notes. Brigands who robbed merchants from the north as they came to Florence (these merchants carried letters) were delighted if their plunder included letters from Petrarch—good money could be had for them!

What will the letter be like in the city of the future? Will it return to its former glory? What will human relations be in the city of the future? What will be left of them? What will pass away?

*"...An old woman entered the trolleybus. I noticed her when I heard someone sobbing. She had in her hands a photograph of a boy, the photograph wrapped in a scarf that also held her money. The scarf had come completely undone, the money had fallen on the floor, her neighbors were picking it up and thrusting it into her hands, but she felt none of this and, sobbing, crumpled the photo. I couldn't bring myself to look her in the face, so I remember only her fingers, swollen at the joints and disfigured by work. No one went over to her, no one spoke to her and I felt that something was restraining me, too. I looked at the people in the trolleybus. They had tired, not unkindly faces, and it was apparent that many of them felt sorry for the old woman. I got off, went home sad at heart and, going up the stairs, thought: why didn't I go up to her? In the evening I had to read several chapters of War and Peace for a class. But even this book fell from my hands, and I kept thinking: why did no one go up to her? I saw her swollen fingers before me, they felt the photograph of the well-dressed boy, these were the fingers of a seamstress, fingers bent by heavy scissors, thickened from thimbles. (My aunt is a seamstress.)*

*"If she and I had been alone in the trolley, I would probably have tried to talk to her. Was it the other passengers who hindered me, then? And did I perhaps hinder them?*

*"...The more I thought, the less I understood that half-empty evening trolley and the more I wanted to understand, both as a human being and as a future teacher: was it all a chaste reserve towards another's grief? A feeling of self-defense? Indifference, tiredness? False shame? A feeling of one's own helplessness? Reluctance to seem forward? Carefully, as they teach us to analyze the conduct of heroes, I analyzed the conduct of the passengers on that trolleybus, until I caught myself*

*forgetting about the old woman. And then I understood why I hadn't gone up to her. I didn't go up to her because her grief did not touch my heart, did not even for a moment become my grief. For then neither a feeling of self-defense nor false shame would have restrained me. Then I, or any of us, would without hesitation have crossed the barrier that separates the grieving human being from those who watch and sympathize.*

*"And, if we can forget for a moment the old woman in the trolleybus (it's not good, of course, that I can forget her already), is it really so rarely that others' joy, too, passes us by?"*

In one of Marx's early works, the man of the future communist society says: "... the feelings and pleasures of others have been my *own* gain."

This formula deciphers the secret of human intercourse and promises unheard-of riches. I sometimes think: others' feelings and pleasures will become my own gain, as the feelings and pleasures of Natasha Rostova became Tolstoy's and the feelings and pain of Emma Bovary became Flaubert's—when she died, so too, it seemed to him, did he. This perhaps naïve comparison has helped me see that meaningful human intercourse is somehow essentially like artistic creation. In human intercourse, we become, though we do not recognize it, artists.

I will try now to trace two features that human intercourse and artistic creation have in common. Artists acutely perceive the world of a particular person, the romance of his character and fate. (That is not a slip of the pen: the ability to see in human "ordinariness" something marvellous and even fantastic is a specific characteristic of artistic perception. Gorky's gallery of documentary portraits of famous and unknown shows this vision well.) But surely, meaningful human intercourse is also the discovery of the world of *this* man. You discover him so that he be yours, and you are the

richer for it. It is not a matter of something becoming bigger, but of something entirely new appearing, something that did not exist before.

In human intercourse, as in artistic creation, unique treasures are born. Every love, every compassion, every understanding is *this* love, *this* compassion, *this* understanding: they are the only ones, like unto no other, like individuals standing face to face.

Here we must return to what we have already said about Bergman's films: in genuine human intercourse, individual attends to individual, one unfathomable "I" to another. In this creative act, the individual turns outward to humanity and participates in—and we do not fear the term—the creation of the world.

*"I agree, there was a certain amount of irritation in my first letter: I can no longer bear the pastoral, especially if it is of a philosophical trend. It makes me sick the way soy-bean candy that I once glutted myself on in childhood made me sick. Childhood is, of course, a great thing, but only on the condition that it is childhood, i.e., the beginning of life. What is good for the seven-year-old is laughable and absurd in thirty-year-old children. And it seems to me that you have set yourself the task of turning us, your readers, into thirty-year-old children.*

*"If, as happens in science fiction, Socrates were to come back to life in our time, he wouldn't wander the streets and market places in search of interlocutors, but would hasten to the television studio to fill with Socratic content this channel of communication with millions of people. It is possible that he would take with him some eccentric in order to maintain the dialogue form. At the studio he would be clothed and shod, and I think the wise man would not clutch at the old cloak when given the choice between it and a television camera. It is you, lovers of pastorals, who clutch at the old cloak: it makes it possible for you to retire picturesquely from the modern world.*



"Don't think that the unhealthy ratio between the development of technology and changes in the world of human feelings doesn't disturb me, too. One of my colleagues, a talented mathematician, very bright, remarked when I discussed this with him: 'The cosmic joy of Dmitry Karamazov when he saw ordinary spring leaves was, for better or for worse, stronger than the feelings that the first humans on the Moon, American astronauts, felt.' You think this man is one with you? Don't be so sure. He has not yet decided—for better or for worse.

"It would seem that just thinking that this might be for the better is, for you, absurd or blasphemous. Just try imagining Dmitry Karamazov flying to the Moon!

"We have come now to the most important moment in our polemic. You would like humanity to rise to the stars without paying. You apparently do not credit the idea that Karamazov's spiritual anarchy is (in the given, specific case) the emotional price of our ascent. It would of course be more comforting if man and humanity developed without losing anything, without sacrificing anything, but isn't it more worthy of serious people to comfort themselves (if comfort is needed) with the fact that the universal law of the conservation of energy acts not only in the physical world, but also in the moral world—the world of man. According to this law, nothing is lost. The riot of Dmitry Karamazov's feelings is smoothed into the precise, determined intellect of astronauts, so that it may again become a riot of feelings in Karamazov's great-grandson, who will experience true cosmic joy when he sees the leaves of trees on another planet. In this is the wise dialectic of ascent. While if you, lovers of pastorals, had real power over the development of mankind, we would sit for centuries around fire-places and speak of Schiller, of glory, of love, until it became completely obvious that these fire-places had again become primitive hearths in primitive caves.

"McLuhan's theory of mass media, it seems to me, soberly takes into account a number of contemporary factors and, while I do not share fully his enthusiasm, I am very interested in a number of his propositions. One of them relates to man and his environment. There were

*whole centuries when man could very easily not notice his environment at all: it didn't change during his lifetime. Our environment changes more rapidly than man, and the only choice we have is to become neurasthenic or to try to understand this unique world. And McLuhan is trying.*

*"Rereading this letter, I note one point of confusion. I wrote you earlier than I am a linguist and philologist, yet I have called a mathematician my colleague. Both the one and the other are true. The field of science in which I work is exosociology (the search for signals from civilizations on other planets), and I am engaged in working out methods for deciphering communications.*

*"By the way, inter-disciplinary scientific research is in my opinion the most modern and promising form of human intercourse."*

There is no life without change, without novelty. But change must not be betrayal—betrayal of man.

Marshall McLuhan thinks a great deal about "environments" of man and little about man himself, he has focused on the secondary, not on the primary. "Rapidly changing reality" dominates people, who have only one alternative: submissively to recognize the peculiarities and consequences of this dynamic domination.

In this "reality" man is almost unreal, as in Bergman's films.

The idea that these two worlds are related seems at first paradoxical. One, the world of McLuhan, is the incarnation of perfervid reality, a stadium whose stands are filled with hooting technology, while the arena is filled with humanity sensitive to the mood of technology. The second, the world of Bergman, is silent, deserted, a sun without rays lights deserted streets, the gloomy stones of houses exude the cold of a secluded human existence.

Nevertheless, these worlds are related. Both McLuhan's theory and Bergman's films tragically illustrate the intensification of alienation in capital-

ist society, where the more powerful "the *objectified generic forces of man*" (Marx's formula, which easily encompasses the latest, colossal achievements of science and technology), the more hostile they are to man. In McLuhan's world, these forces emerge clearly and victoriously; in Bergman's world we feel that they are alien to man indirectly—through the despondency of the vanquished.

*"I read War and Peace almost all night long. I forgot, of course, about my assignment, I read because I could not tear myself away. You of course remember the chapters in which Pierre Bezukhov, on the road heading north, drops in on Andrei Bolkonsky, and they discuss the meaning of life. My God, how good that is! They sit alone and talk of good and of truth, and their souls turn to truth and good. And at the end of the conversation they are no longer the same persons they were when the conversation was just beginning.*

*"Man is spiritual, right? The forms of his body and his face are spiritual, spiritual is his speech. This thought about the spirituality of man is probably too childish for a fourth-year student at a teachers' college, but it filled me with joy while I was reading Tolstoy.*

*"If I were today handed the questionnaire that Marx once filled out as a joke, I would answer the question, 'The failing that you find most repugnant': 'Lack of spirituality.'*

*"I would give this answer because, in my opinion, many detestable failings are explained by the fact that man, spiritually shrinking, and sometimes even degenerating, becomes a soulless automaton.*

*"I dream of nourishing spirituality in boys and girls when I begin teaching. In my opinion, the most important thing now is to deepen man.*

*"And I have not forgotten that old woman in the trolleybus...."*

Surely it takes concentrated labor by the soul to see in an old woman in a trolleybus no less spiritual beauty than in Rembrandt's *listening old woman*.

## Fourth Dialogue

# The Ascesis of Love

I understood when I went to the concert, of course, that the hall would be full, despite the cruel December evening, but I did not expect to see a large, excited crowd at the entrance. The dry snow burned lips, so people looking for an "extra ticket" expressed their hope mostly through gesture and mimicry. The Madrigal orchestra was playing music from the Italian Renaissance. The agitated crowd at the doors broke the chamber music mood with which we had come.

In the concert hall, I began to examine my neighbors: they were young, maybe even youthful, gay, almost playful, their faces were damp and shiny after the snow as they thawed out. Looking around, I saw a few older couples, more attentive and sedate.

The orchestra began to play. There was something childishly serious in the frequent repetition of one and the same theme: the way children read a favorite page over and over, delighting in new nuances.

The Christmas carol came as a majestic joke, the rhythm of the dance was almost indistinguishable from the rhythm of a spiritual symphony, and the song of faithfulness in love seemed a prayer.

The Madrigal joked, talked, pondered, rested in dance, and I thought: *there is no more varied whole than the human soul*. And again: only whole can it, like the sea, be truly varied.

Within this variety, those states of the soul that man, after a hundred, or five hundred, or even a

thousand years, wants to re-experience with their original force, are of special value. Art, especially music, helps him, it *stirs* these states of the soul, at times it cannot awaken them the first time, but it does not rest until it has given the soul a real shaking. And life is then made greater for an afternoon—only one afternoon, but that on which Petrarch saw Laura—or for only one morning, but that on which the young Dante saw the young Beatrice.

One can read and reread *Vita Nova* and the sonnets with an academic respect for the immortal lines and still understand nothing, even though thinking that one understands; or one can experience *this* once as something *personal*, having seen, one's spiritual state stirred by music, the face of a girl for which it is worth living and dying.

*"Doesn't it seem to you that, romanticizing human relations in olden times, in particular romanticizing love, which is made out to have once been astonishing and 'immortal', one may provoke in the modern young reader a dangerous lack of faith in himself, in his own spiritual forces? Unwillingly comparing, he feels despondent: he has never experienced anything like the troubadours, or Dante, or Petrarch are supposed to have felt, nor has anyone he knows.*

*"Allow me to ask you a blasphemous question: 'And was there a girl?'"\**

*"Do you really believe that for twenty, thirty, forty years Petrarch truly loved with a real love a woman whom he saw only a few times in his life, with whom he never, so far as we know, spoke, the same Laura who was married to the honorable Avignon noble Hugues de Sade, who over twenty years bore him eleven children, died from the bubonic plague, was buried the same day and was after*

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\* A paraphrase of: "And was there ever a boy?..." from Gorky's *The Life of Klim Samgin*. It expresses doubt in the truth of what has taken place.—Ed.

six months forgotten by the town and her own husband—he married again before, as they say, he had thrown out the old shoes?

"And the Avignon of that century—with its packs of mad dogs, herds of domestic cattle, the summer stench in its streets—how unlike the legendary, idyllic town whose silhouette graces the elegant editions of Petrarch's works!

"The poet loved the powerful image created by his imagination, an image that, if you will excuse the utilitarianism, fed his creativity.

"And Dante? What does the girl that the nine-year-old boy saw on the streets of Florence have in common with the Beatrice of Divina Commedia?

"This is what I would say: Beatrice as a phenomenon in world literature is indisputable. And the girl Bette? 'Was there a girl?'

When our favorite teacher of literature—old, charming, at his ease, in the light of the sun like an orange butterfly—fell ill, a dismal figure replaced him. "Not a man, but a dull spot," one of our wits said of him. I remember neither his face nor his voice, all that remains are his hands—large, flabby, white, as though carelessly fashioned of dough and hurriedly sprinkled with flour. Speaking, he would carefully flap his hands—it seemed that they were about to fall off and, striking softly, come to rest shapelessly on the floor. He once explained to us that "Juliet was an ordinary girl from Verona whom Romeo's imagination clothed in diamonds".

After that, two things are inexplicable: why Romeo, seeing Juliet at the Capulets' ball, instantly forgot Rosaline, whom his imagination had clothed in diamonds. (After all, Shakespeare's tragedy begins fearlessly enough with Romeo *loving madly someone other than Juliet.*) And why he was not himself an "ordinary boy from Verona" whom Juliet's imagination clothed in diamonds? Picking over these riddles, we, with adolescent pitilessness,

decided that the teacher had without a doubt been unlucky in love and so understood nothing about it.

Later, when I read about Dante and Beatrice, Petrarch and Laura, at the university I couldn't get rid of the crazy boyish thought that the history of literature, particularly its ivory towers, was often studied by people unhappy in love. Two doubts have never given them peace in the study of these "fantastically elevated"—as one scholar wrote—relations.

Did Beatrice and Laura really exist? And if so, were they "fascinating abstractions" for Dante and Petrarch or did the great poets love them as genuinely living, real women?

Conscientious historians pored over the archives and proved with notarial precision that Beatrice and Laura really existed.

The second doubt refers to that area of human relations which leaves no juridically indisputable documents in the archives. Sonnets and cantos are not notarized inscriptions.

A philosopher once remarked that the experience of love is man's most shattering experience. Whatever has been said and written about the paradoxes of love, there is in this experience something that, if not mathematically precise, is morally indisputable: despite everything, crazy regularities and a harmony of oddities exist. Otherwise this would not be an experience, that is, a world won from chaos. And to understand the love of Petrarch for Laura ("an ordinary wife who bore eleven children by an ordinary Avignoner"), one must burrow not into archives, but into "man's most shattering experience".

They sometimes say of a person in love that the new state of his soul makes the surrounding world unreal for him. It seems to me that it would be more precise to say that this person sees new realities in the world around.

Moreover, one can judge whether a person is really in love by the precision of his feeling of these

new realities. When Petrarch in one of his sonnets about Laura, states that he last saw Laura unhappy (in church, on a street?), and writes, sadly, "All—virtue, wisdom, tenderness, pain—was bound in a single harmony of which the earth had hitherto not heard. And closer the sky stooped low, embracing her, and the air was grown so soft with her that no leaf on the branches stirred"—there is a wisdom of love and not cold speculation in this perception of the unity of man and the Universe, in the understanding that heart and leaves form a *whole*.

Poetry—from the legendary Sappho to the Soviet lyricist Nikolai Zabolotsky—affirms: true love is more than a precise science for discovering this new reality—the kinship between our essence and the Pleiades burning in the heavens, or the rhythm of the surging sea. This kinship is usually hidden from the person who does not love: it seems to him that he exists by himself, and the idea that the human heart and the galaxies may live by the same laws does not inspire the slightest confidence in him. He has not experienced the moment when this is revealed *from within*.

Well here, I have opened a volume of Petrarch to copy out those lines and cannot immediately close it again. "And how my feet have not tired of searching out the traces of my beloved's feet." "Weeping I laugh."

She smiled. She paled. She inclined her head.

When Petrarch saw her in an Avignon church, he was twenty-three, she twenty. She was already married. He was a young scholar and poet. On the forty-second anniversary of their first meeting, twenty-one years after her death, Petrarch, by now an old man, leafing through his archive, found a sonnet that he had not liked before and wrote some new lines: "In the year one thousand three hundred and twenty seven, in April, in the first hour of the sixth day, I entered a labyrinth from which there is no exit."



Five years later he died, sitting over his work, pen in hand. Not long before, he had written: "I no longer think of anything but her." He wrote this, having endured a difficult struggle with himself. The older he became, the more clearly it seemed to him that love for her was a sin against God.

But I am writing here things already well enough known. Wouldn't it be better to write of what *I* treasure in this story?

The beloved woman ages. Her hair turns grey, wrinkles cover her face, her gait becomes heavy. It may be objected that Petrarch, blinded by love, did not notice that Laura aged — he saw her only rarely on streets and in churches.

But he noticed. More than that, at the very beginning of his love for her, when Laura was young, he saw her in his imagination aged, with "withered visage", and felt a tenderness and pain that could not be compared with any feelings either in any of the old romances or in his own sonnets. This tenderness and pain was loftier than the sleepless nights when he whispered her name. Sleepless nights had been a part "of man's most shattering experience" before, while tenderness and pain from the thought that one's beloved will age and wither, came into the world with Petrarch.

In his latter works, sixteen years after he had seen her—young, in the portal of a cathedral—Petrarch comforts himself with the thought that he is "more burdened with cares and older in years" and therefore ages more rapidly than she, even though "exhausted by illness and frequent childbirth".

This is no longer the figurative language of the romance, but the realistic, sober reflection of a man who fears that his beloved may die before he. But in this sobriety there is more real feeling than in the most "reckless" lines.

She was over forty when she died. In those times, women faded early. Petrarch saw her not long before the bubonic plague and he loved her as

never before—*old*. There was in this love the promise of great humanit .

In Petrarch, the cultivation of human feelings moved several steps forward, and was raised so high that, even today, to understand it, one would do wise to lift one's head.

And it was this that I wrote to the person who doubted: "And was there a girl?"

*"Maybe your teacher of literature did have hands moulded out of dough, but he was right about Romeo and Juliet. To use Stendhal's image, the male imagination is a salt mine in which glimmering crystals cover a dry branch (the ordinary woman). This is especially true of poets. And Romeo was a poet; he is a part, perhaps the better part, of Shakespeare himself. We should leave Petrarch and Laura. There we are really equipped only with a very few facts (notarized inscriptions) or with purely subjective perceptions of sonnets that sing of ideal love. Let's turn to Lermontov, of whom we know much more. As you will recall, he was ready for torment and strife with the whole world just to press the hand of his beloved once more, that is, he saw in her a being of a higher order. But she married an officer of doubtful reputation, and with this hand, inaccessible to the poet, served her husband coffee in the morning.*

*"When you read the memoirs of the contemporaries of remarkable people are you not struck—in pictures of women whom great individuals loved—by a sharp discrepancy in perceptions? Those who love see in their beloveds one thing, while the surrounding world—including the authors of memoirs, see with a dispassionate eye something altogether different.*

*"I suppose you think (if you haven't already) reading my letter: he must never have been in love.*

*"Worse: I never had a childhood.*

*"The war came, then orphanhood, orphanage, distant relatives, the orphanage again, construction projects.... They say that in the child of five to eight years, talents blossom before our very eyes. Today springs forth the poet,*

then the artist, then the actor. At that age I wanted to eat. So maybe nothing arose. But, apparently, it was latent, it didn't want to die, and to my ill fortune it blossomed when I was more than twenty. I began to earn a decent salary (I was developing into a skilled fitter) and then there came to life in me, as after a lethargic sleep, a little boy who today sees himself as a poet, tomorrow an artist, the day after tomorrow.... But for a child it's easier! In him 'talents' develop painlessly and do not reshape his life, while for me it's been a whirlwind: I worked in the theater as an artist, worked on newspapers, even tried to direct a *dr ma* group.

"I met her before the poet arose in me. Perhaps it arose because of her. I dedicated several notebooks of verse to her, notebooks that for some reason I haven't destroyed, though I'll never risk reading through them again. She had hair that, it seemed to me, it was inappropriate to show except on holidays, as it is inappropriate to go to work in evening dress. She bore on her head a small garland, that bloomed in September, lit by the soft autumn sun. When we were once caught in a summer rain and drops glistened in it like diamonds (again diamonds!), I felt a joy the equal of which I had never experienced and which I will probably never experience again.

"We were the same age, but she felt in me this childish restlessness of energy seeking an outlet and treated me as a small boy.

"But the more I loved her, the more the unbidden boy departed and the strong man returned, the man whom I had felt myself to be in youth and even in childhood. I myself wanted to treat her as though she were little, a girl. But she had had a completely normal childhood and had long since settled down. But despite everything, I saw in her a young girl, because I loved—a generous, wise girl with a head thick with multi-colored leaves.

"And the more I saw a girl in her, the more hated did the boy in me become—this pitiful, infantile being writing a dilettante's verses or painting crude scenery.

"I wanted to amaze and shake her. But how? I returned to my old masculine work in its most risky

form—I signed up as a steeplejack. I once called her to look at me from the ground, as I was walking under the clouds. And, without a safety belt, I walked along a narrow girder, from cover to cover; an unforeseen wind caught me in the middle, and I was sorry that I had set my mind on this, but I made it, breathed easier, rushed headlong down the scaffolding to her—and saw a face so hostile, alien, repellent that I will never forget it. I had intended to astound her, but it was she who astounded me. We were silent for a long time. Then she said: ‘You would be silly if you weren’t so cruel.’

“Lying awake that night, I grasped the depths of my unpardonable offense. She thought that the strong man had wanted to humiliate her, yet never in my twenty-six years had I been a child so helpless, so doubting in himself, even pitiful, as in those moments under the clouds on a narrow strip of metal. And because she didn’t understand, I didn’t want to live.

“What came next? As they say in one movie, ‘there was no next time’.

“...It was an autumn evening—I remember it because I stood in the rain three hours, waiting till she came out of her building, and because, going out for milk for her sick mother, she told me that she was going to marry a sailor with whom she had been corresponding for six years, since the ninth grade. Either their school had been patron to the ship, or vice versa. She added indifferently that she had never seen him. ‘Even in a photograph?’—for some reason I wanted to be precise. ‘Even in a photograph’. Of course, I didn’t believe this idiotic story, but just the fact that she had thought it up added to the offense.

“I went to the North and learned later, in a letter from a friend, that she really had married a sailor and was living now in the South. I rushed in a frenzy to the airport, but the airport was socked in for three weeks in a row.

“The plot is so senseless that I now find it hard to believe: did this happen to me? After a few months, I wrote her, and she answered that she was expecting a child, the town was clean and gay, if I wanted to rest in

*the summer it was possible to arrange things cheaply with a good landlady, the market was black with fish....*

*"There, in the North, an old geologist had an excellent library, in it were the rarest books on history, and, I hope for the last time, something 'arose' in me—I wanted to become an historian. By that time I could allow myself the luxury of becoming a student at thirty years."*

We do not tire of repeating from childhood: "There is an inevitable idealization in love," and we begin to accept this as an indisputable truth born by the wisdom of millennia.

Yes, the person in love sees in his beloved something that those around, "not blinded by love", do not see. They see coal, he sees diamonds; they—"nothing special", he—miracle of miracles. He does not see the ironic smiles of wise men schooled by life, those who understand how this "emotional shock" of love will end. These wise men know well that, sooner or later, the miracle of miracles will become an ordinary being and that he who today is moved by the slightest change in the expression on her lips will also smile—at himself.

Wise men schooled in life have gone through this themselves.

And the day comes. The cover spun of sunlight falls, the miracle of miracles is tugged by the grey ash of the commonplace, diamond becomes coal. Likewise, he or she smiles ironically—at first really at himself, then they become wise men schooled by life and watch with sympathetic laughter the next act of recklessness.

"There is an inevitable idealization in love"—this explains, comforts, this weakens the pain of loss. If it is idealization, then what, really, has been lost: a dream, a mirage? Idealization in love is a waking dream. Is it worth crying over dreams?

But perhaps what we, without reflecting on it at all, call "idealization of love" is in fact not idealization but something different, incomparably

more meaningful and *real*? Perhaps the person in love sees the only, the higher truth about man? This is a truth about the most valuable and the best that is in him—but in him as potential. And the one who loves him sees it manifest, graphically, as though it were no longer potential, but reality.

This is the miracle of love. Coal becomes diamond, but it will remain so for a long time, for ever, if you fashion it and do not simply love it passively.

Over the centuries—and the church has been especially successful in this—mankind has created an asceticism of non-love, but not an ASCETICISM OF LOVE, not something that would teach how to preserve forever what has once been seen in a beloved person, an asceticism that would destroy the banal “truth” about the inevitability of idealization.

To fashion this asceticism, we must first renounce one error—viewing love as something that is wholly within the realm of spontaneity and the unconscious. Love gives birth to itself and departs of its own volition. The highest expression of the irrational power of love—in literature and art—was Carmen. But this irrational power triumphs in everyday life, too: less majestically, but no less insistently.

Stendhal's treatise *De l'amour* was an attempt to direct these stormy, untamed waters into a “precise, stone channel”, but it circulated in only a few copies during the author's life and today, to be frank, it's not a volume we keep at our side. It is easier joyfully to accept love in the image of Carmen—crazy and free, not knowing what will be tomorrow. The formula of the idealization of love was probably engendered as a natural justification for the joy that we can retain no longer than joy itself wants to remain.

But if what we see in a beloved person is not fascinating transiency but the highest truth, and if, having limited ourselves to idealization, we do not retain for always what has once been seen, then

doesn't a real loss (and not just for us, but for the world, too!) impend?

There are probably no two people in love who would see something completely identical in those they love. Something special, *singular*, something *absolute* is revealed in the beloved.

Petrarch, in the terminology of the fourteenth century, called this absolute a "reflection of divine beauty". In the language of our century, we call it an *infinite value*.

The moral labor involved in *re-creating and developing* this value in the beloved being is the content of the asceticism of love. An asceticism is a renunciation of oneself, an abdication. An asceticism of love is the same thing. From a state of "for myself" man must move to a state of "for thou", shift the center of *personal* existence from "I" to "thou". True love is spiritual maternity—it shows itself in nourishing the best qualities in the soul of the beloved person with a mother's selflessness and a mother's patience. It is here that a miracle awaits us. To understand it, one must recognize love as creation—creation of the best that is inherent in the beloved.

But one of the most remarkable aspects of creation is that the artist himself changes. This is especially true of creation in love, because both "subject" and "object" are *alive* and it is impossible to determine who is "subject" and who "object": both, if they are in love, nourish the best that is in the other.

The individual thus supposedly renounces himself, but in this he loses nothing, only gains. He is born again as an individual into whom not only the human world, but the whole universe has entered. The partitions of egoism and isolation are levelled, a new capacity for perceiving the world is revealed. When the poet writes: "In the gloom of forest branches I noticed a barely living likeness of your smile," we believe with him that love is truly a cosmic feeling.

But egoism often triumphs. One or the other of the two in love nourishes the best not in the beloved, but in themselves. The struggle for primacy, the desire to dominate, not to leave oneself open to others but to absorb all one can, creates "idealization" in love. This struggle for primacy, this desire to dominate, forces "the other party" to respond in kind. And so the individual dispiritedly looking at a piece of lusterless coal does not believe that it ever seemed a diamond to him.

*"...Last night I read Héloïse's letters to Abélard and thought: it would be good to publish in one or several volumes the letters of women who have immortalized themselves through love. If I ever have a daughter, I would like to give her these volumes on the day she comes to age, so that she never parts with them. Earlier, daughters were bequeathed pearls, earrings, precious stones, but I would give her this so that she won't lose faith in herself as a woman.*

*"But I no sooner thought of this than I had another thought: only the letters of women who loved great men have come down to us. And these are sometimes not the best women (I am not thinking now, of course, about Héloïse and the wives of the Decembrists), their love has been remembered by mankind because those whom they loved could not be forgotten.*

*"And the feelings of women who have loved ordinary, unknown men: masons, soldiers, fishermen, alchemists, apprentices, musicians.... What about their love?! Are they really less worthy of being remembered? Yet what do we know of them! Look, here's one (nameless!) who loved a sailor, off in some distant land with a sailing ship. Months of waiting, anguish, faithfulness.*

*"I thought until morning about these unknown women and felt that they were my sisters. Those who loved great men perceived in the worth of the persons they loved the worth of their own feeling. Have the ordinary understood that their love is no less a miracle? They should not have, perhaps. They didn't ponder love, didn't write about it, they were in love.*



"And, having arrived at this thought, I understood that we owe them much more than those who loved poets, thinkers and generals.

"Those who loved and didn't understand the miracle of their own love are millions; they ate, drank, gossiped, made merry, went to church, bore children, died young. Feeling that night something great in this ordinary life, I thought: more than once, reading about 'immortal love', I believed—yes, Héloïse, Beatrice, Laura, once in a century, once in two centuries, and the closer one comes the less frequent! But why? Because only once in a century is a great poet born who can appreciate love as a miracle?!"

"If one thinks that 'eternal, immortal' love descends on humanity once every hundred years, then there is little hope that it will fall to one's own lot. And so a woman or a man begins to think: if this happened only to Héloïse, Admiral Nelson or Alexander Blok, can it happen to me?"

"If I ever have a daughter, I will try to nourish in her confidence that love is a miracle that anyone can experience. If it happened to Héloïse, it can happen to me!"

"It seems to me that if before unknown women and men were in love without understanding that this was a miracle, because feeling transcended thought, today, when thought transcends feeling, they often leave love thinking that love has forever departed from this world and therefore what they feel is not love. And I have seen more than once how disbelief in the very possibility of 'eternal love' has made people unreceptive to it, and the miracle has died, scarcely having been born.

"There is much more love in today's world than they think, yes, more, despite everything. This is a special, astonishing love. I can't express it. One contemporary poet wrote that 'love is half the bread of life'. Earlier he could not have written this. This is today, before—love was the 'bread of life'. Today, we need something even more substantial than 'bread of life'. Something new has entered into love, and I feel it, feel it strongly.

"But didn't Héloïse write the same thing to Abélard almost one thousand years ago: that the spirit, and not the body, determines love? Then what has changed? Maybe nothing, and I am getting carried away?!"

It is not you who are carried away, but life itself, love itself that is "carried away": remaining eternal, it constantly astounds us with novelty. In every new age it is something different.

On June 4, 1917, Alexander Blok wrote in his diary: "I talked with Lyuba about *Vita Nova*. A whirlwind of thoughts and feelings—to tears, to this constant pain in my side.... In the evening, I took Lyuba to the station, put her on the train; I won't forget even the details. How fine!..."

Lyuba was L. D. Mendeleyeva, the poet's wife.

As we know, *Vita Nova* was Dante's first book. In it, the poet told of his love for Beatrice from the moment when he saw her dressed in "the most noble vermilion color" to her early demise. (After the writing of *Vita Nova*, the burdensome lot of an expatriot awaited Dante; reflections on "the immortal Beatrice" served him as a source of courage and joy.)

We will, of course, never know what Blok and his wife said about *Vita Nova* on that June morning. Possibly, that after the "fatal passions" there remains in the heart eternal love "for the only one on earth".

But we do know what he experienced and what he thought during those months when he felt physically the "noise from the ruin of the old world". In one of his last articles, he writes: "The sweep of the Russian revolution ... it fosters the hope of arising the world cyclone, which will bring a warm wind and the fresh smell of orange groves to countries covered with snow."

The world in which we live today is in the grip of this "cyclone". The air is thick with the smell of burning villages, giant, sweaty cities, the stench of napalm, but for those of us who have not lost our moral bearings, there is also "the fresh smell of orange groves".

The "fibres of humanity", interweaving, form a strong bough. And this "bough of humanity", absorbing the best of human experience from ages

past (experience both of the great and the unknown), imbued with the pangs of conscience of today's humanity, will become more resilient and vital.

In all ages, love, despite its most delicate intimacy, has depended on the moral state of the world. This is true, of course, of our time, too. There is in love the same "polarisation of god that is the general mark of the twentieth century.

In the capitalist world where the secrets of sex have lost their last covers, where the corporeal and spiritual, moral foundations of man have been sundered with cruel utilitarianism, in a world where they are ready to tear from woman not only her clothes but also to flay the skin from her bones if that will rouse even a little the rotting sexuality of the consumer and pry away his money, the "bough of humanity" is growing despite everything. Something unknown to people of past ages has entered love, has been revealed in love: a new spirituality and new tenderness, a new sadness and new compassion. True love is a triumph over nonexistence. *To say "I love you" is the same as saying "you will never die"*.

For Dante, the bow to Beatrice was an enormous event ("The very limit of blessedness").

The sight of Laura's bare hand when she dropped her glove shook Petrarch. The thought that he might see her face without a veil seemed blasphemous.

For Stendhal, happiness was squeezing the hand of a beloved woman.

I would like to write much more: about the wounding joy of the last love (a generation whose youth and prime coincided with war and terrible labor knew it), about how hostile jealousy is to the very idea of love. But one recollection forces me to end these reflections. This memory has great power over me, because there is music in it: an organ.

Organ music is cosmic not only in its force—when the rumble of galaxies a-borning yields to the quiet happiness of children playing, one feels physically the good in life. This music is a humanized universe.

And when, one autumn night, in a small Estonian town, I heard music coming from a gabled town hall housing a church and in which organ concerts are given from time to time, I froze in the darkened portal and stood for a long, long time.

Then an old man came up, pulled the heavy bronze ring and, without letting it go, just stood there. On the deserted street appeared a group of merry people evidently from a restaurant by the sea, and they, too, quieted, slowed their step. The town hall was dark and solemn; only one small window, barely lit from inside, let out some yellow light.

The organist was playing a Bach toccata. Practice before a concert? Or did he want to recapture something half-forgotten? Childhood? The image of a woman? It seemed that it was not the organ that sang, but those grey-black, grave, ancient stones.

And when the dawn came, I saw on the street a young girl going for milk, and a boy smiling at her sleepily from a window flung open, and I thought that it had all begun in legendary Florence in the same ordinary, natural way, and I felt with physical confidence that the girl *was*.

## Fifth Dialogue

# Imperishable Grain

In childhood, the ancient gods evoked complex feelings in me: I admired their might and their varied talents in the arts and crafts, but, admiring them, I did not love them for their arrogance and cruelty.

Myth, with its clear, fantastic images, with its event that is powerful like long, forked lightning, fires a child's imagination and lays bare in it what is most receptive and most easily wounded. A child reading about Hephaestus or Athena not only *sees*, he even feels. Hence the keen joy and no less keen pain.

I saw myself in the smithy of Hephaestus; full of miracles, I felt the heat of his forge on the skin of my face, I touched the marvellous goblets and chalices and gold and silver dust was left on my fingers. With the dust still on my fingers, I returned from myth to real life.

But I saw no less graphically the punishment that Athena meted out to the brave Arachne for the fact that the latter, a mortal woman, made so bold as to compete with her, a goddess, daughter of Zeus, in art. Arachne had before woven fine cloth. Competing with a goddess, she wove a miracle. Yielding not an inch to Athena's weaving, it was beyond perfection and was different from Athena's only in that the gods depicted by Arachne were less majestic than the arrogant daughter of Zeus would have liked. So Athena sprinkled the young woman with the juice from a miracle-working herb—Arachne's body was reduced, the thick hair

fell from her head, her arms became thinner and multiplied, her face changed monstrously—she turned into a spider and hung, for millennia, in a grey web covering heaven and earth.

And I felt the clinging spider web on my skin. Even now, as I write these lines, I want to lay down my pen and rub at my forehead and eyelids. My fingers have long since been washed of gold and silver dust, but obviously my face has not forgotten the spider web.

Athena was a stern goddess and treated the honor of Olympus seriously. Punishing Arachne, she remained true to herself. Her cruelty was revolting, but it was understandable even to the child. I saw her in a museum, too—in stone—inflexible.

I understood Dionysus less. Loving the earthly life, the young god of wine and merriment turned three dear maidens, daughters of King Minyas, into bats merely because they sat at home weaving peacefully when all the other women went with song to meet him in woods and mountains. And again, I saw. Night, large smoking brands; the bodies of the young princesses, shrinking, are covered with dark hair; the ruins of a cave; bats.

If Athena's cruelty was precise and sober, Dionysus—and I tried to understand him—acted without thinking. He was drunk with wine, merriment, worship and, quite possibly, by morning was sorry for what he had done.

Much later, I understood something more important: both Athena and Dionysus, despite their different natures, wanted, in effect, the same thing: the *dehumanization of the world*. Turning good women into spiders and bats, they brought existence down from a high to a lower level.

Even the life-loving Artemis, turning Actaeon into a stag, did the same thing. Of course, quick-footed and handsome, the stag with its forked, splendid horns is a greater miracle than a spider, but less than a man. Pagan gods, even the

most charming, did not wish to humanize the universe—it would reduce their power.

But even having understood the secret of the Olympians' cruelty, I feel wonder before Apollo. This feeling, too, was born in childhood, then deepened and became more complex, and it has not left me to this day.

He ordered Marsyas hung by his hands and the flesh flayed from him alive. This I *didn't see*, probably because there are some things unimaginable in childhood. It is not difficult to see how a girl turns into a bat: they both are real in a child's world. But it is impossible to see the flesh gradually stripped from a living man. This is outside the world of childhood. One can only, reading the myth, feel pain like that experienced when, having cut your feet on sharp rocks, they carefully strip away the bloody sock. I first took the punishment of the satyr Marsyas by the radiantly young Apollo on faith—as opposed to the story of Arachne or the daughters of Minyas—not in immediate reality, but without form, as impenetrable psysical pain.

But the perception of the music that was cut short impressed itself on me no less sharply: before Marsyas was hung by his hands, he played and, apparently well, just as Arachne worked well. When these feelings—of intense pain and of music cut short—weakened, I experienced a third feeling, which was the most long-lasting—wonder.

I feel it even now, thirty-five years later. But it was then quite a different thing. As a boy, I could not understand what it is easy to guess today: Marsyas was a great musician, like Mozart, and Apollo, having killed him out of jealousy, justified himself with the same, alas, quite sturdy argument that Salieri used millennia later in Pushkin's short tragedy *Mozart and Salieri*: he was protecting art from the dilettante genius, to whom the divine was given too easily, without cruel labor and sleepless nights! It is possible that Salieri, having poisoned the "idler", thought himself Apollo, patron of the

arts, especially of the music that he worshipped. But, as opposed to Apollo, one great doubt was born in him: "Am I, then, not a genius?" — a doubt that makes the figure of Salieri tragic, forcing us, despite all, to feel sorry for him.

However, I have strayed far from childhood, for the boy thought nothing of the sort, and what awed me then is not what awes me now.

I tried — not to justify, no! — to explain to myself the cruelty of proud Athena and of reckless Dionysus, and I succeeded, more or less. But I did not at all understand Apollo's cruelty. It seemed to me that Marsyas should have evoked in Apollo a feeling of sympathy, even of tenderness. After all, Apollo was the patron of the arts and himself a fine musician. When he played the kithara, Ares, god of war, forgot battles, peace and quiet ruled the earth; no one could escape this divine music, not even stern sailors — they went where it led them.

One of Apollo's "second names" was Kitharaeid. Romantic and archaic, it agitated my childish imagination. But what made Apollo especially fascinating was that he sometimes turned into a dolphin. As a boy, I was convinced of one thing: a dolphin is good, he is good itself. On land — Kitharaeid, by sea — dolphin. Could anything be more fascinating and charming?

Marsyas' story I learned after this charm had been implanted in my heart. While in a museum, I came across a canvas depicting the cruel torture: someone drunk with zeal was flaying the skin from the unhappy man — the hand of the executioner was furiously ripping away the skin laying bare the bloody flesh. Neither face held anything human: in the first, because of hatred, in the second, because of torment. Burned through and through by the picture, I was naturally eager to learn what it was that was depicted there. My teacher answered: Apollo, punishing Marsyas. Of course, I didn't understand, and then didn't believe her. There was no such story in the book of ancient myths for



children. And what was there in common between this executioner and a god who was patron of the arts and a marvellous Kitharaeid? Could a dolphin be a hangman?

I learned of the story of Apollo and Marsyas in a complete collection of legends and myths. The satyr Marsyas once found a reed pipe in the woods and taught himself how to play. His simple music entranced field and forest, beast and man. He played better and better, and at last played so well that he ventured to challenge Apollo himself. So that the competition be fair, it would have seemed that Apollo should also play a pipe, but Apollo showed up magnificently dressed and with a gold kithara in his hands. It was not musician defeating musician, but the gold kithara that won over the simple, primitive instrument. Then Apollo ordered Marsyas be strung up and the skin flayed from him. And this, I repeat, is what I *did not see*, even though I had first learned of the story from a painting.

When I was older, I understood: Apollo killed Marsyas with a cruelty unexampled even among pagan gods because he saw in Marsyas, the simple master of a wretched pipe who was able to entrance the world, a *true god*. And what now amazed me was not the cruelty of the patron of the arts, but the fact that, *having worked his cruelty, he had not lost his musical genius*. Moreover, if the myth is to be believed, after Marsyas' execution, Apollo played not worse, but better, and in competition with Pan was great—*creatively great!*—as never before.

After that, of course, I understood that the ancient consciousness did not consider the creative force dependent on the moral bases of human or divine personality. And it would be more than naïve to wish that this problem was viewed, let alone resolved, in myths. This great question arose later. It agitated Pushkin. And it greatly disturbs us.

But having understood this, I felt—and I still feel!—a naïve amazement: why, after executing Marsyas, was Apollo not troubled by Salieri's great

question: "Am I, then, not a genius?" For there are in fact things in the world that are *incompatible*.\*

*"Allow me to question the precision of the formula, which seems to you almost a 'universal law', expressing the peculiar character of the spiritual life of hundreds and thousands of people. I have in mind your enviable conviction that 'a large imagination shows a large heart'.*

*"The identification is seductive. But your argument lacks the precision of mathematical logic. No, I am not a mathematician; but a pediatric surgeon, yet to my scientific way of thinking it seems, if you will forgive me, naïve.*

*"In your Are Wicked Sorcerers Immortal?, you talk about Andersen. He did truly have a great heart, and his imagination was rich. But to make from this individual trait a universal key to life and man?! 'Can imagination be complex and bright and the heart poor and small? Or can there be a great heart with a wretchedly feeble imagination?' It must grieve you: there can be. 'I have never seen a wicked man with a large, bright imagination,' you write. I have so seen. 'On the contrary, good people, from what I have seen, inevitably have large and bright imaginations that do not dim even in old age.' From what I have seen: sometimes, even often, that's not true.*

*"However, we both know that this level of discussion — 'I have seen,' 'Well, I haven't seen' — is worthy of children, and inappropriate in an important discussion of good and evil. Isn't it better to turn to what has been seen and experienced by humanity? Over many millennia. Humanity has seen over many millennia that evil at times has blinding imagination, is able to charm and enchant. Evil has been romantically exalted, contagiously gay, has stimulated joyous feelings of human community. It has made people drunk like fire and wine. It has fascinated: there is strength in it. It is not in vain that the*

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\* An allusion to Salieri's words in Pushkin's tragedy: "Are, then, genius and evil things incompatible?"—Ed.

favorite of the ancient gods is not the good smith Hephaestus but the frenzied Dionysus, who well embodies the seductiveness of evil. From man and beast, ravaged by his worshippers with wild joy, through the arena of the Roman circus, through the romantic cruelty of the barbarians—to the fantastic horrors of the Inquisition! (You will recall, I hope, Poe's Pit and the Pendulum.)

"And beyond that? The Renaissance with the typical figure of Cesare Borgia? Or, leaving the monster Borgia in peace, what about the creative powers of Benvenuto Cellini, whose rich imagination showed itself not only in things incomparable in their artistic value but also, alas, in cruel excesses?

"And wasn't this, too, a great theme: Dostoyevskystung by the same great theme, the temptations of evil? Do you remember what he said of beauty?—"There the Devil wrestles with God, and the field of battle is the human heart." So there does exist a beauty of evil, and how is this possible with a 'wretchedly feeble imagination'?

"Ah, it would be marvellous if your 'universal equation' were to be true at least of the future—good would then have a monopoly on rich imagination and would sustain repeated victories over the grey wretchedness of evil, and children on whom I operate today.... I would like the pain that they experience today, the pain of recovery, to be their last pain. But, to be frank, there is no guarantee that the formula that a rich imagination is dependent on a good heart will ever stand on a level with formulae such as  $E=Mc^2$ .

"May I share with you a thought that is not directly related to your writings? It has long been known that tragedy, as a literary genre, elevates and purges the human soul. This is called catharsis. But there are tragedies, also written by great artists, that do not elevate or purge the soul, though they have incomparable merit. They do not elevate or purge because children are killed in them. I would cite, at the least, Medea. The murder of children, even in high tragedy, is not cathartic. May this not be the explanation of the fact that tragedy as a literary genre has produced nothing of value in our century, so full of tragic shocks and catastrophes (it seems

to me that you have caught this in your phrase 'atomic paganism').\* Children are murdered. They were tormented at Au chwitz, wiped out in Hiroshima, crippled in Vietnam. This makes tragedy that elevates and purges (and without this, it is not a tragedy) impossible.

"I have written this to you because, in the interests of good, it would be better to look more clearly at evil. It is too bad that, working on your book, you were not informed of the experiment of the Italian scholar Bonelli. He pricked one animal with the tooth of a rattle snake, the head of which had dried for sixteen years in the open air out in the sun and had then been preserved for more than thirty years in a flask with some spirit. With this tooth, Bonelli pricked an animal. After an hour, the animal died. Do you not see a certain image in this tooth?

"There exists the world of Andersen, a world which I also love, and the real world, in which we both live, where there have been the experiences of Au chwitz, Hiroshima and Song My. And if we forget that these worlds are different, then one may be defenseless against the 'tooth'! Today, neither of us has any reason to doubt that wicked sorcerers are immortal."

Does evil have imagination? In the 4th century B. C., Herostrates burned the temple of Artemis of Ephesus. He decided—and he did it—to destroy so that he himself would live through the ages. The temple of Artemis of Ephesus was one of the "seven wonders". A man who has wrested a wonder from the world will never be forgotten, reasoned Herostrates. (As we see, irrational be-

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\* I wrote in *Wonder*, of the heroes in Salinger's stories, that they "intentionally see the alien powers of the world around them in the images of pagan monsters. The atomic bomb is a winged demon with cruel, sharp claws and a triumphant, unspiritual snout; the world of the 'sexual revolution' and striptease—a woman with the head of a jackal. A world of atomic paganism. A world in which the alienation of man from the forces he has created, an alienation that Marx noted with the precision of genius more than a hundred years ago, has reached a point of tragic tension".

havior had quite a sober motive.) He viewed the destruction of the temple as a way to fight for personal immortality. To avoid oblivion—and one must suppose that the idea of oblivion was most intolerable to Herostrates—it was necessary either to create a miracle or to turn it to ashes. He hadn't the gift for creation, so he chose the second alternative. Herostrates' deed is truly imaginative. He who thought it out in seclusion and then, sacrilegiously but daringly, executed the plan, had excess imagination. And so? This wonder, which delighted man with its wise harmony of volumes, its "divine harmony" of forms, the esthetic equal, perhaps, of the Parthenon, this wonder became a monstrous heap of charred wood and dead stone. You have to admit that the deed was imaginative! And that Herostrates was a man with imagination.

The "imagination of evil" is an absolutely uncreative force. It gives birth to *nothing*—to nonexistence. The fact that at times it quite effectively gives birth to nothing makes it seductive and dangerous. If we take imagination as the creative power of a man, it is more precise to speak of the *anti-imagination* of evil. Evil is unconstructive in the extreme, and this is directly linked to one of the greatest secrets of human personality—the relationship of the creative and moral principles. This relationship cannot be expressed with mathematical precision, it cannot (I have in mind our present level of understanding) be embodied in a formula such as  $E=Mc^2$ . But we are convinced that it really exists, not only by great novels and tomes of history, but also by our own life. Who among us has not lost himself creatively when doing, wittingly or unwittingly, evil?

But when one investigates something that is more or less disputable, and which, moreover, includes within itself the temptation of really naïve argumentation ("I have seen" or "I haven't seen"), isn't it better, in the interests of cogency, to choose great and really indisputable models?

The hour when the young and poor Petersburg artist, Chartkov, stopped at the picture gallery in the Shchukin Court because he had nothing to do, changed his fate abruptly. The thousand rubles that he found in the frame of the portrait that he had just happened to buy gave him what he had earlier secretly dreamed of. He then became a popular painter, played up to high society, won renown, fortune, completely forgot his earlier hard experiences in art, and began to put on weight as he "advanced in mind and years". And then a second decisive hour intruded into his fate. At an exhibition, he saw a picture by a friend from now-distant youth, and its brilliance showed him, with stunning force, what he had sacrificed for the sake of worldly vanity. At home, he reached for his brush in order to test himself: had at least a spark of his talent, which he had clearly felt in youth and which he had imprinted on his first canvases, been preserved through a miracle? No, not even a spark was left. Chartkov underwent the torments of a man who wants to, but can't, express himself. In his already wasted soul, these torments gave rise to a thirst for destruction. Before he went out of his mind, he avidly fed this thirst: he bought the best work of talented artists and secretly destroyed it.

The plot of Gogol's *The Portrait* is usually interpreted as the story of an artist who betrayed art for money. And this does, in fact, lie on the surface of the tale. But Chartkov betrayed first of all not art, but himself, and after that art betrayed him. This is the story of the disintegration of a human personality—not for nothing does Chartkov end up clinically insane—of a personality that did not recognize *moral responsibility for its own talent*.

The tragic lesson is not that the artist was seduced by a coach, luxurious surroundings and intermingling with aristocrats (even artists who preserved "the spark" to their last days have sometimes suffered from this), the tragic loss is that

the man deserted the artist and forgot about him. And when the artist then kills the man—not metaphorically, but in actual fact—this is to be interpreted as the retribution of the creative force. Deprived of a moral foundation, it becomes destructive, “demonic”. (Not for nothing is there something clearly demonic on the face of the old man in the portrait!) The dialectic of moral and creative principles is exposed by Gogol mercilessly and with anatomical precision.

When the man betrays the artist, the artist kills the man.

This theme—the catastrophic betrayal of moral first principles—has pierced great Russian literature, especially Dostoyevsky.

On the first pages of *Crime and Punishment*, Raskolnikov feels able to do good for humanity. But to find the path to this great role, it is necessary to kill “a nonentity”—an insignificant pawnbroker of no concern to anyone. Deciding that *this is permitted*, he murders: physically, he murders the “nonentity”, spiritually, that is, creatively, he murders himself. And he—a split personality!—can no longer do good either for humanity or for any single being in the world, even sister, even the woman who loves him.

When, in *Are Wicked Sorcerers Immortal?*, I thought about the way Hans Christian Andersen perceived the world, I wrote that a large imagination grows out of a large heart, but I did not, of course, mean to say that people lacking good in the ordinary sense of the word could create nothing of value in art or science.

To refute purely *empirically* the formula, “a large imagination shows a large heart”, is not at all difficult. Bunin, it is said, was not a good man; his imagination, on the other hand, the “light breath” of his talent, can only be envied!

After the book was published, I received letters that, in a polemical gust, cited Byron and even Pushkin; their “sacrileges” and “madnesses” were

detailed. And, naturally, none of my opponents forgot the great tragedist Kean ("genius and libertine") or François Villon (who, as we know, led a far from virtuous life).

In these purely empirical refutations, one feels a *lack of profundity* in the understanding of man, of his relations with his time, of his emotional and spiritual life. "Sacrileges" and "madnesses" have usually been due to the fact that the artist does not accept a social environment alien to him and defends himself against it—as he does, too, through "arrogance" (Lermontov) or "sullenness" (Blok).

When Blok wrote of the sullenness of the poet ("Is this really his hidden motor? He is entirely a child of light..."), he expressed not just his own pain and hope. Pheidias, Mozart and Pushkin were children of light, François Villon, Kean, Byron and Yesenin were also children of light. To understand this, one must try to see the "hidden motor".

But this is what it is all about, that once one sees it any empirical refutation is itself refuted from within. There is a need for a deeper understanding not of the individual human being (even if he be Mozart or Byron), but of the *world of man*.

It is not science, but art that tells of the structure of this world with the most cogency and fullness. (Though undoubtedly in the future a synthesis of science and art will explain what is most hidden in the spiritual world of man, its "last secrets".)

In man, there is a difference between the emotional and the spiritual life; philosophers and artists know this difference well. The spiritual life is the hidden center of the personality, its germ, from which grows moral self-consciousness. The emotional life is full of varied feelings, it can be troubled, even tormented, but if the center is alive, if the germ is *working*, the personality cannot lose its integrity and dignity. The difference between Mitya Karamazov and Ivan Karamazov (Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*) is that, in the former,



despite the "rebellious", tormented emotional life, the spiritual nucleus of the personality is alive; in Ivan, it is seriously wounded. In Pyotr Verkhovensky (*The Possessed*), it is dead.

I have dwelt on this difference, because it helps us understand why some artists—Villon or Michelangelo—despite their far from blameless life, did not lose the gift of creation.

I see the human soul in the image of an artesian well, at the bottom of which lives something absolutely priceless, but it can also be thought of in another way: from the window of an airplane, in a rift between thick clouds, there open, like an unexpected gift, the green of trees and orchards.

One can see this not only in imagination, but also in reality. See, and not experience as a miracle. And then go out of one's mind. On the morning of the sixth of August, nineteen hundred and forty-five, the thick clouds over Hiroshima opened in one spot, and an American pilot, Claude Eatherly, saw trees, gardens.... He gave the order to begin.

Blinding lightning struck over the town, then a sea of black, impenetrable pitch raged, and when all was again quiet, there were neither trees, nor gardens, nor children. But even after many years, women in Hiroshima were giving birth to babies that were like spiders and bats. Atomic paganism celebrated a victory. And former Major Eatherly lay in a military hospital for the mentally ill.

The story of Claude Eatherly is the myth of the twentieth century.

Wounded unto death by the immensity of the evil that he had automatically (an animated screw in the military machine) unleashed upon the world, Eatherly, his conscience tormented to nightmares and insanity, was becoming a human personality. He sternly judged himself and those who had sent him to Hiroshima. In an ancient myth, a young woman, to avoid rape, prays to the gods: take away my form! Eatherly prayed: "Return my form to me! I was born a man. Return it."

A Japanese general, one of the first to arrive in tormented Hiroshima, saw a woman with a terribly burned face and a body split apart, and next to her, in the dust, alive but unborn infant. This is like a nightmare, like one of Eatherly's nightmares when he thrashed in his bed: "Children, children!"

I have seen two portraits of Eatherly. In one, he is a young and smiling major who reminds one of a "fascinating" superman from an American war movie, though the features of his face seem a little shallow for a movie star; in the second, his features have become improbably enlarged,\* as if seen through a magnifying glass. This is in all likelihood because there is no longer a trace of the careless smile with its fleeting wrinkles.

The absolute immobility in this face is shattering. It is both dead and alive (it died or was resurrected this very moment). It is like a mask.

In fact, it is not the second, tragic, face that is the *mask*, but the first—the thoughtlessly smiling one. It is a mask because it reflects not the world of *this* particular man, but the spirit of the American army as the war was waning, a war that is closed out with minimal losses and maximum confidence in its own might. The second is not a mask, but a *face* impressed at the tragic moment of *birth*. It is stiff with pain, because birth is *pain*.

Eatherly dared to break the mask, and for this, the American military put him in an asylum, having declared him insane. But if the torment of consciousness is insanity, then the most normal person in the history of mankind was Eichmann: the memory of millions of victims did not trouble him at all at night. Eatherly's self-consciousness was born in the most monstrous torments, like the child that lay next to the disfigured woman on the hellish earth of Hiroshima. And this makes one think that the self-consciousness of the individual should be born *before* and not *after*—in the second, not the fifth act of a tragedy, when it is too late to make good the damage.

In the hospital, Eatherly read and reread Plato's *Dialogues*. The Socratic idea that evil is done through *ignorance* was to him, evidently, not to be understood abstractly—it had for him the power of an original discovery, because it was his personal truth, he had reached it himself.

Yes, he was a slave of ignorance: from ignorance of the weapon (they had only been told obscuredly that it was “wonder-working”) to ignorance of himself, of that innermost spiritual nucleus of the individual, which was wounded unto death by the consciousness of boundless evil.

What did he discuss with Socrates in the dead quiet of the ward for the “dangerously insane”? That the conscience is not an invention of philosophers, but no less a reality than “the first principles of the world”, fire and water? Or, perhaps, about immortality? Because, if after two and a half thousand years Claude Eatherly, immured by generals in an insane asylum, having come to hate the atom bomb, dreaming about the redemption of his sin, felt a need to commune with Socrates, then immortality, too, is no invention; it is also real, and Socrates, who in a biting polemic persuaded those who loved him of this—before his cup of hemlock—did not deceive them in the name of false comfort.

Out of the structure of the spiritless civilization of the contemporary West has emerged the “Eatherly phenomenon”, which is of moral value for all mankind. Something elemental is expressed in it: the structure of the ethical consciousness of mankind in a transitional age. Within this phenomenon live both Socrates and the girl who in a thousand years may be born sick because the genes of one of her distant ancestors were struck by blinding lightning.

The Austrian philosopher Günther Anders wrote of Eatherly: “His is the attempt to keep conscience alive in the Age of the Apparatus.” If we are to believe the American press, high speed

computers selected targets for bombardment in Vietnam. The traditional understanding of the reliability of the machine has changed: not the least role is apparently played by the fact that it is reliably conscience-free.

The value of the "Eatherly phenomenon" is that, in the "Age of the Apparatus" his nightmares put to the world the vast question of the relation between moral and creative forces in man and in *humanity*. The atomic storms that destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki showed the might of the blinding anti-imagination of evil. It has become clear that creative forces not ethically balanced are infinitely destructive.

The relationship between the creative and the moral have never played so great a role in the fate of the world, or in every individual's fate, as today. Gogol's Charkov destroyed fine pictures in seclusion; today's Charkov can destroy a museum together with a city, together with a country, together with a continent.

The Louvre, Paris, France, Europe....

That is what I was thinking about when I wrote "a large imagination shows a large heart"—a formulation that is, perhaps, naïve, but provokes polemical meditations on good and evil with people more than just a pediatric surgeon.

*"You think that you are fighting a utilitarian attitude toward man, yet your supposition that 'a large imagination shows a large heart' is utilitarian in its essence. Today, Marx's idea, that the development of man's forces under communism should and will become a goal in itself, is often repeated. You, too, write of this, not forgetting to add that one must in any circumstances treat man as the highest goal. I believe this is Kant's idea. It is indisputable. Yet your own idea of the large heart and the large imagination is clearly incompatible with these two great ideas. Tell me: why shouldn't the development of the moral principles in man be a goal in itself? Why*

can't the highest goal be good, or rather, goodness? Understand: in and of itself! According to you, one must be good in order to build cities, make great discoveries, think meaningfully, imagine well. One must be good because otherwise one's creative potential will waste away and one will create nothing valuable. Yet Maria Bolkonskaya didn't write, didn't discover, made no scientific discoveries—she was good because she couldn't live otherwise. She had compassion and she provided help, this was for her the only possible existence. And, despite a large heart, she did not have a large imagination. Tolstoy gave that to Andrei Bolkonsky, who was less good. In your opinion, is Maria Bolkonskaya an uncreative individual?

"Reading the beginning of my letter, you have probably already conjured up an image of the writer: an out-and-out failure, a sterile being, who did not succeed in becoming a 'creative individual' and is left with only one recourse—to praise Maria Bolkonskaya! Believe me, goodness in and of itself is not for me a form of self-justification or self-glorification. I am 32, a biologist, a Ph.D., I work in a field both fascinating and highly promising. And Maria Bolkonskaya is my favorite figure in Tolstoy.

"I remember reading in childhood, in a tattered book, a touching story. Basically, it went like this. In Paris, there is a brilliant statue in a museum of the fine arts; the statue was executed by a sculptor living and working in a garret. Just as the clay mold of this statue was finished, freezing weather hit Paris. The sculptor knew that if the water in the clay froze, the harmonic lines of his statue would suffer, so he took off his clothes and put them on his creation. In the morning, he was found dead, but his idea was saved and was executed in marble by other hands.

"Yet this story, apparently intended to strike a child's imagination, left me cold. When I was older and again thought about it, for a long time I did not understand my indifference—until I realized that the artist, having undressed in the cold garret, muffled and warmed something that was not alive. A child does not make a distinction between the work of a genius and a

non-genius. But the difference between what is and isn't alive is the most important thing in his perception of reality. If only the artist, having sacrificed himself, had saved something alive—an old man, a boy, a dog, a sparrow!

"It may be that this 'discovery' explains my hostile attitude toward even the most exalted self-interest and my special love for Maria Bolkonskaya. She warmed the living. She is for me the artist willing to freeze in order to warm a living being rather than a plaster cast. Now I understand that my indifference to the drama played out in a Parisian garret is the reverse side of the perception of life as a miracle, a perception especially sharp in childhood.

"At the same time, this explains my hostility to your assertion: 'A large imagination shows a large heart.' I feel in it, too, something exalted and, perhaps for that reason, not without self-interest—and this is most dangerous.

"In our day, this self-interest is sometimes clothed in very imaginative forms. We had in our academic club, 'Under the Integral', our regular evening of 'crazy ideas', and one of my comrades, a young and talented biologist, told of the alluring possibility—in the future—to modify and replace human genes. We call this somewhat vulgarly 'cracking the genetic code'. He said that this would probably save humanity from mental illnesses. A philosopher stood up and said he would not want to live in a world 'violated by biology', that 'cracking the genetic code is a blow to the individual' and, finally, shot off his final argument: 'In your world there will be no Dostoyevsky!'

"So I argued back—'And aren't thousands of sick people, who are not at all geniuses, their torments, the grief of their sisters, wives and mothers, too high a price to pay for Dostoyevsky?'

"Why don't you try to imagine the history of humanity without Dostoyevsky, and then decide whether the price is too high?"

"But why do you think,' I said, 'that there can't be new intellectual structures that will give rise to new forms of

genius? And who can prove that even now the artistic genius must, like Dostoyevsky, suffer from epilepsy?"

"But none of my arguments had any effect on the philosopher, he remained convinced that if humanity may in the future lose a second (sic?!) Dostoyevsky, then it is not worthwhile to change genes to save the world from mental illnesses. This, too, it would seem, is exalted self-interest, for we were speaking of genius, of spiritual wealth, of artistic and moral values, which this newly manifest genius will give the world...."

"Exalted self-interest—one of the most dangerous forms of utilitarianism—comes in many guises...."

I think: if goodness "in and of itself", good as a goal in itself, the goodness of Maria Bolkonskaya, were to become the fundamental, dominant form of human existence, in the end goodness would die in the world.

I think this because I do not take the formulation "a large imagination shows a large heart" one-sidedly. Yes, imagination, that is, the creative faculty in man, is nourished by the heart. But imagination itself, in its highest reality—in *creative deed*—enriches the heart. Without deeds, spiritual despair and ethical decay are inevitable.

If the creative forces disappeared, good, too, would disappear, for an *ascending* existence would yield to a *descending*.

The perception of life as a miracle should not be passive. From this perception grows a truly lofty ethics.

Its peak is the ethics of revolutionaries.

Beyond the perception of life as a miracle, and of man as an incomparable value, there is a natural desire to see a world ordered "according to the laws of beauty", a world in which nothing would disfigure either man or life. There is a no less natural demand for revolutionary activity. And after that, there is born the activity that renews the world.

The force of this logic has been felt by most great revolutionaries, but especially, perhaps, by Chernyshevsky, Lenin and Dzerzhinsky.

When Dzerzhinsky's wife wrote to him in prison that their son, three-year-old Jasik, was overjoyed by greenery, the singing of birds, plants, flowers, and living things, Felix Edmundovich wrote back: he will be a revolutionary.

He will be a revolutionary, because, feeling the beauty of the world, he will want human life to be just as beautiful and sublime.

But does an intelligent, talented woman, who states as a categorical imperative that goodness in and of itself should be the highest goal, really not understand this? I am sure she understands.

I am persuaded of this by a small but essential clarification in her letter: she first wrote "*good*", then changed it to "or rather, goodness". Good really should be the highest goal. This can be stated as a categorical imperative. For good is the elevation of being to a higher level of development. (Man does not become wood, as in pagan myths, but wood becomes man.) Good is the triumph of higher forms over lower. Good is the creation of a new world, a new man. And will this happen of itself?!

I think our biologist wrote her letter because she yearns for a living, unassuming, "naïve" goodness. "Good old goodness", goodness "in and of itself" is needed by all of us and, feeling it, we joyfully proceed to the creative goal to support *good*. (I understand that those last lines again provide some basis for accusing me of "exalted self-interest".)

Our pediatric surgeon wrote of Bonelli's experiment and interpreted the poisonous tooth as the image of "immortal evil". So I want to talk about grain. They lay clenched in the hand of a mummy for four thousand years. They were planted—and ears sprouted.



## Sixth Dialogue

# The Eighth Day of Creation

Once in the mountains of Armenia, I discovered in a sheer wall of stone a human face as large in its natural scale as a Gothic cathedral.

The wall was slightly concave, so the face seemed inclined, as if looking at something specific in the distant plane made iridescent by the play of cloud and sun. It occupied a royal position: it was raised over endless distances, touching the clouds with its hilly, cupola-like brow.

In the mountains one discovers new figures in the stone every minute: centaurs ... the ruins of feudal castles ... ocean liners ... bison. And human visages crowd around, one can study in them the history of artistic schools and tendencies from the archaic to cubism.

The stone shows the beauty and peculiarity of the world. The universe unfolds before us in pictures that tell of the variety of life. And if our imagination is worthy of this wonderful game, one can see more on a mountain road than on a trip around the world.

In the grin of imagination, one may think: the stone also shows what has not entered the world, what has not been born and cannot be recognized by us—the faces of tomorrow's being. Today, this is a cipher, as feudal castles were a cipher before their time, and millennia before castles—centaurs.... One must suppose that human faces, too, were carved by the wind before man appeared. And that rock resembling a cathedral, too? Slightly bent toward the plain, it attentively watched the

procession of centuries: dinosaurs, forests, glaciers...

At that moment on the mountain road, I thought that this giant face expresses the universe's yearning for man.

Don't we, yearning for some beloved face, draw it mechanically in the sand or in the margins of a manuscript?

This idea of the universe's yearning for man put the stones surrounding the road in a new light. I now took it structurally: what had been a drawing or a relief stepped back, became "material", and began to evoke deeper vision, as if a curtain was pulled, a curtain that had shut out a fascinating and varied performance. The shape of the stone became impenetrably mysterious, behind its uneven surface one could divine a great world, and one wanted to destroy this impenetrability, liberating, liberating, liberating.... Axes, gods, castles, spaceports.

As we know, the biblical god created the world in six days, then, after fashioning man, allowed himself to rest. A pessimistically inclined atheist philosopher once despondently joked that the world was not a success because rest held too great an attraction for God.

Seriously, though, is it really not clear that the world, the best in it, is a success because, after the legendary, biblical seven days, there followed a real day, a day measured in millennia, grave, illuminating the history of the Earth—an eighth day?

This day—really, morning, we are even now far from midday!—may be described as the time when great ideas, discoveries, wonders of art, science and technology—an endless list—were born. To be sure, other, subtler descriptions touching on the spiritual condition of man himself, are possible. Finally, a cosmic description, with a certain proportion of imagination, is within the range of possibility.

It is this last that I thought about when night came and the southern sky began to stir over the mountains. It breathed, it was alive. I smiled at the thought that, in effect, Chekhov's "the sky in diamonds" is the image of the humanized universe. Pheidias is a diamond, Beethoven is a diamond, and Rembrandt, and Chekhov himself. Diamonds, diamonds....

I remember how as a youth I loved to think: what man does and what is in him is reflected in the universe. This half-childish certainty that gladdened my heart apparently stemmed from two factors: the attraction of science fiction (its dawn in literature coincided with the youth of my generation) and the idea of the structural unity of the universe, an idea that science opened to us. Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, I thought, or the moment when Maria Volkonskaya fell on her knees before her Decembrist husband as he stood in a Siberian jail and kissed his shackles, could not but provoke something new and wonderful in the universe. Perhaps a particle was torn from a distant Sun and bore the seed of a life I could not imagine—exalted and beautiful in the extreme, of course. Or: a superstar, pulsating, illuminated a gloomy abyss, promising in the unforeseeable future a game of primordial life. I could not believe that in the hours when Michelangelo was finishing the Sistine Chapel nothing changed in the universe. And Gioconda's smile! I felt that it explained the secret of the origin of novelty: blossoms spirituality spirituality in new forms of ascending being.

Older, I learned in a book by the remarkable Soviet scholar V. Vernadsky the idea of the noosphere, an idea that seized my imagination more powerfully than the most outlandish science fiction. Today, Vernadsky's formulation has circled the world and has entered weighty scientific and philosophical tomes, has become almost the common property of mankind.

In its essence, this is one of the most far-fetched ideas of the twentieth century. (To slightly rephrase the well-known witty observation of the great physicist, it is crazy enough to be true!) Vernadsky discovered in the world around us a new reality: a blaze of thought ever more thickly and warmly blanketing the planet, spreading beyond and above the biosphere.

"...And even today, to a Martian capable of analysing sidereal radiations psychically no less than physically, the first characteristic of our planet would be, not the blue of the seas or the green of the forests, but the phosphorescence of thought."\* This is not a poet or science fiction writer speaking, but a scholar, though the image he uses is sooner artistic; and the artistic, metaphorical force is just what excites me.

Living reality has turned out to be more fantastic than the play of a youth's imagination! Rembrandt's canvases, the moment when Maria Volkonskaya fell to knees, and Gioconda's smile have entered, along with other great philosophica, artistic and moral discoveries, into the noosphere, and they blanket the Earth with a flame that gleams in the Universe.

The sky in diamonds....

That gleam of thought that rational inhabitants of neighboring heavenly bodies might notice is the very greatest thing in the eighth day of creation.

Modern life has brought artistic images and scientific formulae into close proximity. The noosphere is at the same time "the sky in diamonds". And "the sky in diamonds" is the noosphere.

And the southern sky began to darken over the mountain road, the east throwing light on stone after stone.... And I thought about youth or, rather, about childhood—not my own, but humanity's, about its "golden childhood", about the ancient

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\* Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, London, 1950, p. 183.

world, when man pondered himself in stone and compared himself with the gods, and the gods with himself. (When Homer called his heroes "like unto gods" he was flattering both his heroes and the gods.)

Ancient art seems miraculous: such an expanse of beauty, such "god-manly" creative exertion, the Earth has experienced neither before nor since. And for that, the childhood was — "golden"!

But is man himself not a miracle? And that expanse of life, those biological exertions of the young Earth, which still had memories of the solar matter, exertions that led to man?

Isn't the "wounded bison" on the wall of the Altamira cave, with whose story we began our narrative, a miracle?

*"I think I have figured you out: by arranging these discussions as an answer to a naïve reader who doesn't understand that creativity is more than just literature and art, that the creative individual is not necessarily a composer or painter, you have led us away from the most difficult question—the tragic discrepancy between the intention of a great artist and what he creates. No matter what you write in an effort to comfort and give hope to your reader, creativity in its highest expression is Rembrandt and Beethoven, not 'work on oneself', love, and the community of ordinary people. Listen—when Beethoven had finished his Ninth, he thought, wanted, and hoped that the world would begin to sound like his music—and what happened? One great symphony more?! He wanted a new humanity, a new being. He had them in his mind. And what did he create? One more 'artistic value'?! Then he died in loneliness in the old world that had changed not at all for the better. When Rembrandt painted his brilliant portraits of old men, he wanted absolute understanding to reign on earth, yet he himself departed this earth, without being understood and infinitely alone. When Michelangelo painted the Sistine Chapel, he seemed to himself a god. (I think he even once*

exulted, 'Today I am a god!'), but what changed in the world? One museum more?

"I love art, but I try to go to museums as little as possible. It hurts me to go. I hate this cold, dead word—museum. Guides walk around with crowds that look absent-mindedly at the walls, the guides mutter something banal and known to everyone already. Did those whose paintings and sculpture grace the cold halls really suffer torments for this?

"We stand before the canvases of Velásquez and Murillo, admiring their incomparable beauty. But they were painted in fanatical Spain, where, beyond the windows of the studios, women were led off to the stake. And none of the incomparable pictures.... No, I do not want a miracle. I am merely considering the disparity between the artist's intent and what he obtains. And I believe that in the future there will be, not the creation of artistic values, but of being, of life itself. I believe this, though today it's like the plot of a fantastic tale like your 'Fourth Page of Parchment'.

"Reading your discussion of the 'wounded bison', where, sketching the cruelty of today's world, you tell about the slaughter of six thousand elephants in Africa, I thought: and what if you were taken twenty thousand years back in time and entered the Altamira cave as the unknown genius began to paint the bison, and told him about this, that is, about the elephants? Wouldn't he lay down his brush without finishing the drawing if he knew that after twenty thousand years.... Complete this 'thought experiment', enter the cave with news of the murder of six thousand elephants, and find out, but attentively and honestly, whether our primitive artist finished his 'wounded bison' or not. Will he want to paint something after this, or will he forever part with his brushes?"

We shall fulfil this wish: we shall move back twenty thousand years and enter the Altamira cave with the news of the slaughter of six thousand elephants in present-day Africa. It is hoped that the dialogue between modern man and the artist of the

Magdalenian period is as logically precise as possible.

"Do you kill them to assuage hunger, because in your world, too, there isn't enough food?" is naturally the first question.

"In our world, too, millions of people go hungry, but elephants aren't killed for food," is the only honest answer possible.

We do not forget that, under the conditions of the "thought experiment", the artist of the Magdalenian epoch for a minute breaks away from the stone coming to life under his hands and stands before you or me with lowered brush—and in the given instant, with head sunk in thought. This is a man who truly feels the power and grace of the living body, who is able to feel with joy the miracle of life. This is a genius with a high (relative, of course, to his time) moral consciousness. And finally, this is an inquisitive, restless, childishly curious human being, who wishes to understand the world and its secrets.

You and I are for him emissaries of an incomprehensibly distant world. Yet at the same time, we have the same visage as his fellow tribesmen, the same hands, the same ... yes, yes, it is the face that he will now, raising his head, look at especially attentively and—running ahead of the story—with increasing amazement.

But let us return to the dialogue.

"Why, then, do they kill these large, strong and beautiful animals?"

The answer is for him inevitably incomprehensible, but it holds the key to subsequent explanations: "They kill them because areas that elephants have trampled look like the devastation after an atom bomb."

And we tell him what an atom bomb is. It may be that he understands us, more or less—in his time, meteorites fell on the Earth. But this hardly means that he will understand why it is necessary to destroy six thousand elephants.

I think that his thoughts, if we can tailor them to a precise and laconic formula (that is, abstract them from the emotional state of an emotional man), will arrange themselves in a concise question:

*"Wouldn't it be more rational to destroy atom bombs if they leave behind a waste like areas trampled down by thousands of elephants?"*

And we agree with him that, yes, it is better, more rational to destroy atom bombs ("lunatic meteors"), and then, being honest to the end, we tell of the sober cruelty, the care and "rationality"—so that the precious tusks not be harmed—with which the elephants were shot, of the care with which their carcasses were dressed, and only formless mountains of innards left on the ground. We can even—for effect—show him mountains, snapped by the best photographers in Europe.

Then begins the most important part of our "thought experiment". The dialogue ends, minutes of choice and decision begin.

Strictly speaking, the "thought experiment" ends here, for to understand truth, we must now forget the hypothetical conditions set and experience the intercourse of these two people, separated by twenty centuries, as something absolutely real.

I have no doubt that the artist of the Magdalénian period, like the artist of any other century, worked for the triumph of good though he unquestionably less fully realized this than his future confrères. He apparently took this vivification of the rock as a miracle of life itself.

When I see how my daughter rejoices when spring buds appear on the branch, I understand better the state of the primitive artist's soul.

And this feeling—*something* changes in the world when I draw—was for him the most real inspiration. Will he put aside his brush without finishing the drawing when he learns this *something* turned to be deceit, that the world after unnumbered generations became even crueller—they kill strong, beautiful, *good* animals without thought of food?



(I am agitated as I write these lines, as if in fact he can, learning of the slaughter of six thousand elephynts, put aside his brush—and there will be no “wounded bison”, no “Zeus” by Pheidias, no—me?!)

But that is the point: he will lay aside his work only if he is absolutely convinced that it is not necessary. He is an artist, and the most important thing for him is *authenticity*—not stories about good and evil, about the details of the future world, but *man himself*, who from this *Tomorrow* entered his torch-lit cave. His face. He raises the torch to the face, which he has looked at with intense concentration from the first minute, he raises the torch to *see deeper*. What he sees will decide him: is the “wounded bison” to be or not to be.

Our primitive artist will see the contemporary (to us, and not to him) soul in his own way: with childishly direct, intuitive and unassuming wisdom. I think he will experience delight and compassion simultaneously, having felt the new great and secret that is hidden in this soul. Its humanity and pain, generosity and capacity, restlessness and vulnerability. And he will feel its power (he has a well-developed feeling for power), and its inspiration (he already has a new understanding of the miracle of life). He feels: the radiation that is barely perceptible in his drawings (that same *something*!) has become as great a reality as fire, water, forest and meteors. He may touch this face, leaving traces of ochre on it (fibers from the “wounded bison”!), touch with a tenderness that his heart had not previously known.

By morning, the “wounded bison” will be finished, one of the first diamonds to burn in the heavens, a grain large as a pearl will enter the fabric of the nascent noosphere.

*“Like the girl with whose letter you began these discussions, I, too, am probably not a creative person. She traces plumbing. I am a stenographer.*

*"In high school, I wanted to study geography, but I stayed with my mother, she is sick and old, and so I finished stenographic courses and now I am on my own. I never had any talents, didn't draw, never sang or wrote poems, so I guess there is nothing to complain about. Well, there's one ordinary geographer less. What I found most attractive in geography was travelling, and I try even now to travel in the summer. In the winter I save up a little money, then in the summer take vacation and take Mama to Kizhi, or even Solovki or along the Volga; last summer we went south, we had long dreamed of Kerch. In the winter there is music, we always have tickets to the conservatory. But of course I have to work a lot, and the work is fatiguing. When I had thoroughly mastered shorthand, I began to take down and transcribe automatically, without even understanding the contents, as if I were a machine. But once after transcribing notes from a meeting of the academic council, when I gave a copy to either a linguist or a mathematician, he suddenly asked: 'Did my arguments convince you?' I was embarrassed and, without raising my head, answered, yes, they were persuasive.*

*"Since then I have worked more consciously and often even retain some of the more interesting things, but despite everything I often feel myself small and uninspired at work.*

*"Yet at a conce, especially when Mozart is being performed, or before some ancient and ruined building in Kerch, or in the morning on the Volga, I feel as though I have grown wings.*

*"Once I thought I would find myself a hobby. All around me, that's all they say: hobby, hobby. They write about hobbies in magazines and newspapers. Mama says that hobbies are so popular in our day because people are often more developed than the work they perform, work is narrow and monotonous (Mama describes it, somewhat old-fashionedly, as 'not very gay'), and at the same time doesn't exhaust us as much as it used to exhaust our grandmothers and grandfathers, when there was no energy left for anything else. Hence the hobbies. I began to collect catalogues from exhibitions. Then I got bored, and*

there is something dead in this. Of course, it's not too late for me to continue studying, I'm only twenty, I could become a doctor, engineer or teacher. It is the more realizable if I begin evening courses.

"Why have I decided to write you? Probably I should have explained myself at the very beginning, but I thought if I began with that you would be offended.

"I am afraid that you will begin to deceive that fine girl, though wishing, of course, only good for her, who wrote frankly that she feels herself untalented and most ordinary. Telling about how good and fascinating life is, you will unintentionally arouse great expectations in her: maybe she will find within herself a hitherto undisclosed talent, or will make some good, intelligent man happy, or will do something remarkable that will delight people around her. But she will find nothing like that in herself, will make no one happy, and will do nothing remarkable, and so she will feel even more unhappy than if she had not raised her hopes....

"If you don't intend to comfort her, then forgive me, but my more successful friends sometimes comfort me. One is a ballerina, another a stewardess on the Paris run, a third the wife of a great and talented man. They comfort me, and I think of Kizhi.

"And she is not at all untalented! Why didn't you notice this, why didn't you tell her in your first discussion? Maybe you will tell her subsequently? Can an untalented person really want what man to change from white to blue or orange when she is happy?

"You should understand this better than I. Can an untalented person really feel 'as though she had received a gift' when she sees maples turning red outside the windows?

"One shouldn't comfort her, but envy her, that's what I want to say to you. Ballerinas should envy her, even stewardesses on the Paris run...."

These discussions were conceived from the very beginning as a tale of the different realms of creativity that any person — "the most ordinary and

untalented"—can find himself in, having revealed the best in himself. I hoped to show that there is a democratic equality in the spiritual world: the difference between "creator" and "rank-and-file man" turns out to be only relative. All of us are, to one degree or another, potential creators.

But, reading the letter of the girl who grows wings before ancient, ruined buildings in Kerch, I guessed that I was writing more about the different realms of creativity than about man's spiritual world, man's spiritual life proper. Yet the heart of the problem is precisely this spiritual life. Naturally, sticking strictly within the limits of my original intent, I can classify the "form of existence" of this girl as the creation of her own personality. But I do not want to do this, something in her letter does not fit within the limits of my original intent.

Wings—that's what do not fit! Not so much the wings themselves, but the image of Plato's *Phaedrus* that they recall to mind.

In this dialogue, Socrates pictures the human soul as winged and tells in detail how the wings grow, how they sometimes break and how the soul grows them again.

When the wings first grow, the human soul itches the way that the gums itch when a child cuts his teeth. A winged soul gifts man with a higher state, makes him divine.

Socrates voiced this thought two and a half thousand years before the birth of the girl who, at the ancient ruins—ruins of a construction perhaps contemporary to Socrates—felt the same itch that a child's gums feel.

Of course, it did not occur to the girl that the destiny of the world, the destiny of humanity became at that moment her personal destiny. She did not think about the fact that she had gone through a profound spiritual experience leading to "human eternity". It did not occur to her that she was touching, not thousand-year-old stone, but the origin of life itself, because she felt the warmth of

the palm of a man who may have talked with Socrates about the winged soul. Without realizing it, she experienced the *emergence of her soul* from its cocoon.

We often understand spiritual experience too bookishly and abstractly, forgetting that it begins with love for plant, animal or old building.

We think that spiritual life is the possession only of the great.

But in the spiritual world, there are no impenetrable walls between my experience and another's. My spiritual experience and Mozart's, despite the great difference between us, in effect live on the same island, better, on the same continent.

Sluggish souls—those whose wings have broken and who are too lazy to grow new ones—are inclined to comfort themselves with the thought that the age-old lot of the ordinary man is ordinary reality. What is given to Jupiter is not given to a bull. Isn't it better to think that the "winged bull" is given no less? This is, of course, a joke, but to be serious—in any meditation "on creativity" we must clearly recognize that it is everywhere where the human spirit lives.

For me, the last letter is a precious grain of human consciousness that will enter the noosphere alongside diamonds. This letter, just as the first from an "ordinary, untalented" draftsman, speaks of the change that has taken place in the fabric of the "ordinary" human soul: it has become more complex, more sensitive and subtle, something very capacious has appeared in it. Miraculous fibers stretching into the future! The current of spirituality linking us with Yesterday and Tomorrow gives the highest sense to the most "commonplace" life, to the most "ordinary" consciousness.

We live in a time when the face of the world is changing. The creators and witnesses of this metamorphosis, we are at its very core and often take manifestations and things as deformed or disfigured, forgetting that they are but *moments* in a

perfidious development; we do not feel in full measure the extent of the wonderful novelty that awaits humanity tomorrow. A marvellously *completed* novelty. And it is in us, in the fabric of our souls.

Today's world seems at times far from beautiful: it is experiencing an expansion of technology, technological strain, a demonic acceleration of rhythm. There are philosophers who say that beauty and spirituality have departed from it. But they have not departed. They are like some rivers in India that roll on to the ocean *underground*.

We are the waters of these rivers.

The great social changes that began with *the ten days that shook the world*, and the development of the scientific and technological revolution will crown the present, gigantic metamorphosis of the earth and humanity with the birth of a new culture, a new man.

The fate of this new culture, this new man, depends on the capacity and firmness of the wonderful strands reaching into the future. Consciousness of this cannot but raise our ethical responsibility for the treasures of the spiritual world, of the spiritual life of the individual.

We are creating a new world, a new being, we are not creating miraculously, as maximalists and dreamers would want, but *practically*—in the development and ascension of life and man. In order for the earth to ring like a symphony, it is little, unfortunately, to compose music, even of Beethoven's genius; one must understand and change the world, one must vanquish the greatest evil—the alienation of man from the forces and things that he has created, and from that original life that gave him birth.

When Marx wrote of the return "of man to himself as a *social*, that is, human, man" and, developing his thought on communism, gave a precise formulation—"such a communism as a completed naturalism = humanism, and as a completed

humanism = naturalism"—he had in mind the final liquidation of all forms and aspects of alienation, the triumph of harmonious relations between man and nature, between man and man.

Marx himself, answering one of the questions on the renowned "Confession" questionnaire called, with maximum laconicism, the basic condition for existence: STRUGGLE.

Struggle, and not a miracle. Although we sometimes want; passionately want, a miracle—perhaps the times are "guilty", for they have endlessly expanded man's potential, have given him a new feeling of his own might.

Or, if we think more broadly, the human soul itself is guilty: an impatient, capricious fidget.

If we are to speak of a real, and not imaginary miracle, the miracle is *eternal man*, whom neither the cup of hemlock, not the inquisitor's flames, nor the executions at the walls of Père la Chaise, nor tsarist exile and hard labor, nor the ovens of Auschwitz, have killed.

As one fine fifteen-year-old boy wrote me:

*"Last night I discovered a great truth. No one has died. And no one will die. Never."*

# CONSTELLATIONS

*Portraits*



I was walking one night through heavy black pines and through glimmering white birches that seemed light, almost incorporeal. There was no moon. The sky, full of stars, was also black, heavy and also glimmering; it moved along with me. The trees were still but the sky kept changing and constellations floated above the forest. The sluggish midnight sky, the solemn, silent throngs of constellations—reminded me of one of my oldest wishes: to bring together the kindred spirits of various epochs so that they, despite differences in time, could talk together and come to understand one another. I looked up at the constellations, *my constellations*, and out of sheer joy, stood still. The sky also stood still. And when I walked on, my heroes went with me....

# First Constellation Eccentrics

## Trevisan

As he was dying on the island of Rhodes, Bernard Trevisan pronounced a truism that, on paper, seems harmless enough. But childish, naïve truths may be especially painful when one realizes that they are bound up with human fate. Reaching such truths requires long meditation, difficult sacrifices, and sleepless nights. Bernard Trevisan paid dearly for the truth he stated as he lay dying 500 years ago: "To make gold, one must start with gold."

He was born at the beginning of the fifteenth century in the old Italian town of Padua. When he was a little boy his grandfather told him about the searches of alchemists who wanted to find a secret substance that could enhance metals—turn them into pure gold. The substance was known by different names—the philosopher's stone, the great elixir, *magisterium*, *tentura*.... It could also be, if one believed the grandfather, a universal medicine—a solution of it, a gold drink; it would bring healing, long youth, and possibly, even immortality. In legendary, ancient times Egyptians knew how to make gold from non-precious metals. And manuscripts which told the secrets of this art also existed. But the manuscripts were destroyed in the third century A. D. at the command of Emperor Diocletian; he feared that the alchemists' gold would inundate Rome and devalue the government treasury. For more than ten centuries people desired the universal powder, the philosopher's stone. They experimented, searched,

dissolved things—they did not leave their burners for days on end, again and again filling their retorts with secret fluids nourished by insane hopes. Their dark laboratories are enveloped in legend.

The grandfather's stories excited the boy. Perhaps he, Bernard Trevisan, would return the lost secret to mankind, perhaps he would find the powerful philosopher's stone. His family encouraged him, apparently hoping for colossal wealth. And perhaps, at the beginning, Bernard himself shared in carefree, boyish dreams of countless chests of gold coins. But after a number of years the dreams faded. And later, when Bernard had squandered the last of his inheritance on experiments, he was so seized by the *mad search* that there was no time for even fleeting thoughts of wealth. Gold, for him, became something alive, something that must be carefully cared for—like a rare plant that would spring up out of dry, rocky soil. If, as a child, he possibly had had naïve notions about money, at age 70—a beggar, a lonely man—he had still not lost his boyhood faith in miracles, he saw in gold the tree of childhood. And I think that at night, as he drifted off into uneasy sleep in his crowded laboratory—with its overloaded burners, stills, and bellows—he saw the image of the tree with its foliage giving off a dim yellow radiance. If man is indeed the highest being on earth then why can he not “grow” the best metal, one that glows like the sun or, perhaps, like a ray of sunlight condensed into solid, weighty matter.

Trevisan was the most selfless alchemist, and he had a quite developed poetic perception of reality that, undoubtedly, could be explained by the epoch in which he lived. It was the beginning of a great epoch, the spring, the first blossoming of the Renaissance in Northern Italy. A new attitude toward life was stirring—a new wine suffused with the sunlight of that amazing world. But, at times, particularly in a transitional epoch, new wine can be discovered in old bottles. One can sense the

atmosphere of the city and the century in the paintings of Pisanello and Andrea Mantegna, artists of the early Northern Italian Renaissance who were a whole quarter-century older than Bernard Trevisan. A gothic air infuses the restless, almost Vrubesque figures; we see familiar figures anew—people of the Renaissance—on a background of gothic walls and cupolas. This is Pisanello. And on the forbidding, severe canvases of Andrea Mantegna we see a vivid sky, high clouds, an infinite expanse, and the harsh spirit of asceticism, the spirit of the first 1000 years A. D. In this amazing landscape of the century, the moods of different epochs are joined; the early days of the Renaissance are reflected here as well as the atmosphere of Padua, the town that rose at the very doors of Central Europe. And though the backgrounds of paintings changed slowly, in real life people were already tired of castles, dungeons, prison towers, gloomy streets, and, half-finished cathedrals. A thirst for beauty was arising, as was a longing for the days of antiquity which had come to be associated with true greatness. This was the epoch in which people wanted to return what had been lost, to rediscover the wonder of life.

Humanists, scholars and artists excavated the land, dug up archeological remains and searched for manuscripts and statues. In Italy there were legends of fantastic discoveries—it was said that excavators along the Appian Way found the undecayed body of a girl who was of inexpressible beauty and who died almost 2,000 years before, in the age of Pheidias. Why were the legends about alchemists more compelling for Bernard Trevisan than this—the urge to bring the Golden Age of antiquity back to life, to beautify the world with art, to capture the eternal beauty of man? Why did he withdraw from living reality—with its towering skies, troubled roads, women and happy children—to work in an acrid, smokey, dark laboratory? The man who entered a fantastic laboratory of

burners, retorts and bellows was a man of the new world that was just being born, a man with an intense love for nature, insatiable demands for research, and a desire to bring to life even the most minute aspects of reality.

In the High Renaissance, an artist and a scholar were often one and the same person. Trevisan was a scholar who had an artist's perception of things. The notions of that epoch as well as artistic sensibility are reflected in Trevisan's conception of gold as something living—a plant—that cannot be obtained or created, but must be grown. Believing that the world rises from lower to higher development, he was convinced that as centuries passed, 1,000-year-old non-precious metals would, by themselves, naturally turn into gold. The gold in the depths of the earth was indeed not created in a single instant; it evolved in the course of time, in much the same way as a plant evolves. Its seeds were sown earlier, at the very beginning of the world; long ago it was something less perfect. If only one could discover the secret of its growth, of its rise to perfection! Oh, if only we could grasp this, the greatest secret, we could, with its help, obtain great treasures—diamonds, gold!

He also began to think about man. Didn't man, like gold, grow gradually and naturally from less perfect beings? Isn't there an universal key to this great mystery? The development of man, and of gold, is the completion of the work of the Cosmos. And if a way could be found to miraculously make gold—not in 1,000 years but in an incomparably shorter time—from tin, for instance, then—why...? He did not dare to think through this idea, but the dream of the potential perfection of the world tormented him during long, sleepless nights when he was experimenting with new and at times most fantastic substances in his stills.

There were no limits to Trevisan's patience. He did experiments dissolving and crystallizing various minerals and natural salts. He experimented hun-

dreds of times with alums, blue vitriol and different substances from the plant and animal world—grasses, flowers, manure, butter.... It seemed as though there was nothing left to cook, melt, burn, clean or evaporate. And yet not once did luck smile upon him. But not losing hope, he concocted things on his burners and muttered: "From imperfect to perfect; gold is the most perfect of metals and man is the noblest being."

I see him, already an old man, in a small gloomy laboratory. He is cooking 2,000 chicken's eggs in a huge kettle of boiling water. After this he carefully removes the shells, gathers them and heats them over a low flame until they become white as snow. An assistant separates the whites from the yokes and then mixes them with manure of white horses. They have already been working with these substances for eight years, hoping to find the powerful universal solvent and, with its help, the philosopher's stone—to complete within hours and days the tremendous, mysterious work of a thousand years. Eight years on one and the same thing: kettles of boiling water, chicken's eggs, manure of white horses. (The credulous Trevisan was constantly surrounded by charlatans and probably one of them told him the "secret"—that the horses had to be white.) And today, concluding the experiment, Trevisan is pale. His cheeks are sunken after a sleepless night and his anxious hands hang useless at his sides. Understanding and not understanding, I look at him in puzzled amazement—the way adults at times view children, as though children were creatures of another world and we adults, touched and aloof, never had been children ourselves. I catch myself feeling that Bernard Trevisan is me, as a boy—despite his grey hairs and wrinkled hands. He is a child and only seems like a creature from another world. I also grew up in that world, and there is no need to be amazed by the 2,000 chicken's eggs, the kettle of

constantly boiling water, nor even by the white horses. Didn't I also have my own *white horses* in childhood? They seem funny now, but they inspired my imagination then and kept me from sleeping at night: trees with blue leaves ... the black pearl ... white horses. The world is a wonder, the world is a promise.

After eight years of monotonous and compelling experiments, gold yet once again slipped beyond the reach of Bernard Trevisan. But this did not weaken his spirit nor his belief in success. "I shall find the seed which will grow into great harvests of gold.... Nature doth first beget the imperfect, then proceeds she to the perfect. Besides, who doth not see in daily practice art can beget bees, hornets, beetles, wasps out of the carcasses and dung of creatures? And these are living creatures, far more perfect and excellent than metals." And again, not stopping, he searches on, experiments, and his spirits do not fail him. His money is gone, he is decrepit, but the fire that has burned within him since youth has not been extinguished.

Now, with rare endurance he experiments with spirits. "Thrice ten times Bernard Trevisan rectified spirits of wine 'till', as he said, 'I could not find glasses strong enough to hold it.'" Hungry, he worked on in the laboratory, which was already similar to a dungeon, for fifteen years—until he was convinced that he would not find the philosopher's stone there. Then, believing that the secret of the great elixir is contained in sea salt, he moved his laboratory to the banks of the Baltic Sea. He spent more than a year, distilling sea salt day and night while there was still the smallest hope that he could obtain the philosopher's stone from salt. When there was not a shadow of hope left, he did not give way to despondency. He groped his way along to a new clue: to dissolve silver and mercury in a very strong mixture of acids and aqua regia, and then, combining both solutions, to stir them in a crucible outside, in the open air, so that

the rays of the sun would act directly upon the liquids.

"For does not the sun acting upon and within the earth form the metals?" he argued. "Is not gold merely its beams condensed to a yellow solid? Do not metals grow like vegetables? Have not diamonds been known to grow again in the same place where years before they had been mined?" He, too, had heard of mines being closed to give the metals an opportunity to grow larger."

Now he seems like a good magician from a children's story, told anew. He sits on the banks of the sea, filling vial after vial with a magic fluid expecting a miracle. And I wish there would be a miracle, just as in childhood I wanted the heroes of made-up stories to obtain whatever it was they had counted on and wanted. Grow forest—grow across the path before my wicked step-mother catches up to me! Crash down, prison walls! Open sesame! Grow gold, in poor Bernard's crucible!

It did not grow. Bernard Trevisan, now over fifty, decided to find alchemists who were more successful than he. He went all over Germany, Spain, and France, visited secret laboratories and talked with those who, like himself, sought the absolute. And the way those people spoke was most strange: "Whatever is below is like that which is above, and that which is above is like that which is below...." "Had not Jason and the Argonauts gone in search of the Golden Fleece, which was nothing else than a book of alchemy made of sheepskin?" "The father thereof is the sun, and the mother thereof is the moon, the wind carries it in its belly, and the nurse thereof is the earth.... By it this world was formed." "But if whatever is below is like that which is above...."

In this seemingly nonsensical talk, these notions were timidly touched upon: a unity in the house of the world; a mysterious law of raising the level of existence; a power that is manifest at the highest levels of development; the possibility of



mastering such a power and magically speeding it up.

Many honest alchemists were talented scholars, keen thinkers, and naïve materialists; they did much to bring about the birth of a genuine science—modern chemistry.

Trevisan travelled to the East, to search through 1000-year-old manuscripts in old Alexandria, to find the lost and forgotten secret of the philosopher's stone. He spent four years at this and did not find the elusive manuscript. And again I see him in my mind as he, with tremendous concentration, leafs through the yellow, quietly disintegrating parchment. He is already sixty and he is still excited about gold, but not because it is the most precious of metals. Gold is his affirmation—the absolute has been found, the secret of the universal power that governs the world and brings it to perfection has been revealed. This is the power that can return the joy of youth to an aged body and even grant immortality.

No, Diocletian was not able to destroy all of the secret manuscripts. There must be some left. One has to search. He searched, obsessed, yet unhurriedly.

Later, longing for more active work, he again began his experiments. He had a new idea. He was now a pauper, but he borrowed money from a merchant who naïvely believed alchemy could multiply his riches. Trevisan began treating a rare iron ore with vinegar. He became so obsessed with the quest that he hardly slept, ate, drank or left the laboratory. He exposed himself to toxic fumes. Emaciated, drawn, and a physical wreck, he still did not allow himself to sink into despair, or to lose all hope. He searched until he had wasted the last of his money on experiments. And then, broken in body and in spirit, alone, helpless, he returned to his native Padua. His family shunned him, the city did not recognize him. While he was foolishly squandering his parents' hard-earned money in his

search for mythical gold, Padua found the real, the one true gold. She had become rich by trading and developing her crafts. She was adorned by talented craftsmen whose studios were already famous in Italy. The first museums, full of the wonders and rare art of the world, appeared in Padua. The sun of the Renaissance shone brightly on the city and it seemed less severe and old, but Padua neither understood nor pitied Trevisan. Children of the new generation were happy, but happy children can be more cruel than sad children. They taunted Trevisan when he appeared in the streets and, as is noted in his biography, only one little girl, Lavinia, felt sorry for the old man. She loved his stories about the amazing secrets of the world.

What did he talk about with her? In what ways did she sympathize with him? In the back of my mind I see them on an old street of the city.

But within him there still glimmered a longing for the secret of gold! He moved to the island of Rhodes and from that point on, for me, he becomes an utterly make-believe, enchanted figure. In the ruins of a monastery on the island he found books of old philosophers—Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus. Now it seemed to him that to find, to create the philosopher's stone it was necessary to understand the innermost essence of the world, the origins of existence. He was seized by a desire for knowledge. For ten years he read and reread the old philosophers, elaborating upon their ideas and yearning for the truth.

Once, in a dream, he saw Socrates. They were sitting together on a rock on the banks of the sea. Socrates patted the rock and said, "The more the sun heats these rocks the happier one is to sit on them."

"Yes," agreed Trevisan, pleased that Socrates seemed relaxed and happy to be with him.

"And do you really wish this stone would turn into a big piece of gold?" Socrates asked smiling, good-naturedly.

"No," said Trevisan with sincerity, "I don't want that."

"Are you afraid then that we would quarrel over it?" smiled Socrates.

"No," answered the ageing Bernard. "I wouldn't want that because it's better for us just to sit here, to rest here on this rock."

"Well, then, for us, this rock is even better than a piece of gold," agreed Socrates pensively. But then he stunned Trevisan with the question: "Perhaps this is the philosopher's stone?"

Trevisan felt his face suddenly turn pale but Socrates reassured him: "I was joking, Bernard. I called it the philosopher's stone just because we're sitting here on it, thinking, talking. But just think, perhaps there is no other, or can be no other philosopher's stone?"

"No other, at all?" Trevisan said touching the stone in amazement.

"No, no other than *this*," laughed Socrates, gesturing that he and Trevisan and the rock beneath them formed a whole. "Man and the world, the world and man..."

A day later Trevisan died. And, as he lay dying, he said something which might strike one as banal, "TO MAKE GOLD, ONE MUST START FROM GOLD."

## Palissy

Where have all the centuries gone? What happened to the sixteenth century—with its astrologers' towers, caravels, public executions and tournaments, its court jesters, the torture racks of inquisitors, cunning intrigues, dangerous roadways, religious wars and tranquil philosophers? It was the century of the last alchemists and the first printed books, the century of Catherine de Medici and Pieter Breughel, the St. Bartholomew's night massacre and great sea voyages. Can one imagine two figures more incongruous than Montaigne and Calvin? One was a clear-headed, well-intentioned thinker who concentrated more on himself than on the vices of the world; the other was a fanatic, who—to rid the world of evil!—burned heretics at the stake. But Calvin and Montaigne were, indeed, compatriots and contemporaries. Do we not expect such paradoxes in any century? In the fifteenth century Botticelli and Cesare Borgia were compatriots and contemporaries. But even recognizing the fact that there were no uncomplicated centuries, the sixteenth century seems particularly complex. And the further we go into it, the more it seems exactly like going into a dark cave. We take care as we trudge along not to fall into a hidden well; we long to find some unknown source emitting rays of light. But again we find ourselves in darkness and, groping along, we yearn to see a world bathed in sunlight.

I would like to discuss one of the rays of light that breaks through the darkness of the underground, Bernard Palissy.

For now, let us imagine that past centuries do not really leave us but, like old castles—castles with towers, halls, secret passage-ways and, of course, underground chambers—suffer the ravages of time. If we, as in an adventure novel, were to climb up a rope ladder hanging from a stone wall and peer into a tower window, we would see an old man lying on some straw in a corner and a young man, solemnly, heavily, but smartly dressed, standing before him. There is no pane of glass in the tower window, for that would have been an unseemly luxury for that time. The wind stirs the old man's beard and disturbs the straw.

"I feel sorry for you," says the young man. "If you cannot reconcile yourself to the Catholic Church I cannot guarantee you your life."

"Sire, I pity you," answers the old man on the straw. "It must be terrible to be a king and not have the power to spare the life of his subject."

The king, Henry III, leaves. (After several months he himself will be killed.) Palissy remains in the tower to die in loneliness on a pile of straw. And we are unable to help him. There are bars on the window; it is a prison tower. But even if there were no bars on the window, a sixteenth-century dungeon would never, under any circumstances, hand over a prisoner to the twentieth century. Surely this would constitute a scandalous violation of the laws of centuries as well as the laws of dungeons.

Nothing can be done; we will leave Palissy in the tower. But meanwhile, as we climb down the narrow rope ladder, we look around—from this head-spinning height. On the roads we see knights and beggars, monks and craftsmen, people on foot and people on horseback. These are indeed sixteenth-century roads, the sixteenth century—when there was a great desire to move about, especially among youth. Students, apprentices, young artists wandered around Europe in the hope of seeing, discovering and understanding

various things. And they also got into discussions or even fights with monks; people on foot avoided the armed horsemen. The roads were restless—a match for the century and its people. (And, yet, isn't it strange that in our stormy epoch—with airplanes, automobiles, and trains—we live a more settled life. Perhaps this is because the original curiosity about the world has been lost and travelling has become a diversion rather than exploring and learning.)

Up on the ladder we try to make out a solitary figure dressed in shabby craftsman's clothes down on one of the restless roads below. There he is—he's walking slowly, carefully looking at the roadway and surroundings, and checking to see whether it is a cave or a quarry that's before him. He goes in.... It's Palissy! He is a young man at the very beginning of his long, long journey. His life embraces almost the entire sixteenth century—at age sixteen he struck out on the road, at about age 80 he entered the tower. Only about 10 years separated him from the fifteenth century and from the seventeenth century as well: he was born in 1510 and died in 1590. He proved that even in the very darkest century—a century of executions, religious wars, intrigues, and a time that poisoned one's feelings and beliefs—a man can remain a man, and a master craftsman remains a master craftsman.

Thus, here he is, sixteen years of age. He saw a mine shaft and walked inside. On his way there will be many caves, quarries and mines to arouse and satisfy his curiosity. But we cannot stay on this unsteady ladder while he explores, studies and moves farther on, for all this surely took him several long decades. Therefore we will return to our twentieth century and take a good old book down from the shelf—Gaston Tissandier's *Les Martyrs de la science*. We open it to the part containing a sketch of a frail old man half-reclining in a corner of a dungeon. His head is proudly

raised. Young king Henry III is there too. The dungeon is the Bastille. Here a craftsman who did not reconcile himself with the world, died — some 200 years before the day the prison itself would be destroyed by revolution.

We left young Palissy on one of the troubled roads of the sixteenth century. Later on, in his memoirs (fragments have come down to us and they form one of the finest parts of Tissandier's narrative) Palissy tells how he travelled from place to place, working at the same time as a glazier, a potter, and as a surveyor. He worked in Spain, Flanders, the Netherlands, on the banks of the Rhine. He did not see the world from the height of a saddle, nor observe it idly — which is sometimes the enchantment of travelling. In this way his particular, profound perception of the world took form. The road he took and his very comprehension of innovation were in themselves a high calling. He did not observe the house of the world, he lived in it.

When he picked up a rock, examining it unhurriedly, or when he felt his way along the wall of a dark cave, he discovered many, many interesting, instructive things. He knew how and loved to work. He walked on, and apparently, the infinity of things both great and small opened up before him, as it did for his contemporary Pieter Breughel. A magnificent tree ... the fastidious brickwork of a wall 1,000 years old ... fine silver work ... a beautiful landscape. All this evoked a keen and almost envious curiosity which was, at bottom, a blasphemous yearning to create something that had not been created before, to give birth to something ingenious.

He was in this frame of mind when, spending the night at the home of a German craftsman, he noticed a faience cup on the breakfast table. Rays of sunlight danced upon the cup. A gift from an Italian craftsman, the cup was put out on the table when guests were in the house. The enamel surface

was so delicate that one was hesitant even to touch it.

At last Palissy made up his mind. With utmost respect he picked up the cup and began examining it religiously. Can this really have been made by human hands?! Is it really possible to create so light and dazzling a butterfly or so delicate a budding blossom? But then, is this a cup? Such things can only be miracles. As someone once said, there was good reason for the masters of faience to strictly guard the secret of their craft. A craft? Then even he, craftsman Palissy, could create *this*? No, it's a dream.... On that day Palissy firmly resolved that, no matter what the cost and despite all else, he would discover the secret of faience.

Two centuries later, the Elder Tree Mother created by Hans Christian Andersen, proves to a good, but rather slow little boy that *fairy tales grow out of reality*. It could be said that the strongest argument in favor of such a notion is the story of Bernard Palissy, a man who held a faience cup on the tips of his fingers and did not rest until, in utter seclusion, he discovered the secret of faience, and became a master craftsman whose works had no equal. (Today they are displayed in the Louvre and the Hermitage.) It is all the more amazing because Palissy, a good craftsman endowed with a variety of abilities, felt, at the given instant, entirely helpless. He felt faience was miraculous not only because it was incomparably fine workmanship, but also because he did not, in fact, understand the *craft* of faience, how to create faience.

Now roads were no longer the important thing for Palissy. He needed a home, a workshop. He returned to France, settled down in the little town of Sainte, married and started a family. But Sainte did not view Palissy as an honest craftsman or a respectable family man, but as a dangerous eccentric and perhaps even a lunatic who should be locked up in a hospital. As Palissy wrote in his memoirs, he came upon the secret of faience by



groping his way—like a man wandering in darkness. People pursuing some mysterious goal who grope along as if in darkness do not but arouse the guarded amazement of others who resolutely follow well-trodden paths and self-assuredly distinguish night from day. In no time at all, stocking-makers, cobblers, and notaries—who perform one and the same type of unquestionably necessary city labor—had grave doubts about Palissy's strange activities. And, honestly speaking, they had some solid grounds. Here was a man who worked day and night but sent nothing to market and only spent what little money he brought back with him from his long years of travel! To the petty burgher, the future bourgeois, this must have seemed insane. Judging from the stove that Palissy built, one might assume that the town had acquired a new potter. But where on earth was his pottery? And what kind of stove was it that stood out on the street, that had no roof, and that was falling apart because of bad weather! No, one must work, get rich and then build whatever one wishes. But what was Palissy after? No one in Sainte could answer that question.

Palissy's behavior was indeed bizarre. Once he did not leave his stove for six days in a row, thinking that success would come at any moment. But toward the very end of the experiment he ran low on fuel. He raced home and carried back his chairs, then his tables, and then the planks from the floor. Someone saw Palissy throwing his furniture into the fire and the whole town of Sainte began talking about the potter who had taken leave of his senses. Respectable shopkeepers were no longer able to extend credit to a man who was ready to tear up his own home to feed a luckless stove. They demanded that his possessions be confiscated to cover damages. Cruelly derided by the town, the dangerous eccentric and his wife and children found themselves out on the street. (Today, Palissy's lovely faience is exhibited in the Hermitage.

I often walk past it as I come out of the room of Rembrandt's paintings—the great eccentric of the seventeenth century who was also once thrown out into the street with his wife and children. The posthumous fate of eccentrics is enviable. They are eventually understood by millions of people who are shocked that a great desire to remain oneself could, at one time, have been incomprehensible.)

To earn some money Palissy again took up land surveying. He was skilled at different trades and there was only one thing at which he had not been successful: discovering the secret of faience. Perhaps that cup had, after all, been created by rays of sunlight. No, it was produced by meticulous, talented hands. Palissy lit his dilapidated stove. The inhabitants of Sainte, seeing his persistence, must surely have concluded that he was searching for the secret of the philosopher's stone.

In our day—400 years later—we can discover how faience is made by looking it up in the encyclopaedia. But for this bit of knowledge, craftsmen of past centuries had to go through what Palissy later described in his memoirs. He wrote that only the mewling of cats and the barking of dogs delighted his ears at night and that sometimes bursts of wind and gusts of storms were so strong that he set everything aside despite the time he lost. He would return home late at night or at dawn, staggering from side to side like a drunk and as dirty as a man dragged through all the puddles in the city.

The stocking-makers, cobblers and notaries of Sainte mockingly observed Palissy's insane antics. Long before they had shrugged their shoulders saying, "In the final analysis, what harm is there in having one lunatic in a respectable town?" For 15 years the "mad potter" did not leave his stove.

I would like to tear myself away from Tissan-dier's *Les martyrs de la science* for a moment and climb back up the rope ladder leading to the tower window. There an eighty-year-old man, half-

sitting and half-lying on the straw in the corner, is now dying. There is something puzzling in the personality and fate of this old man, which relates not to the secret of faience, but of man. It seems perfectly natural that after selfless labor faience finally emerged from his stove and Palissy began making excellent dishes. He called it "village" dishware because on it were depicted leaves, lakes, fish.... The *artistic* quality of the illustrations is striking even today. When did Palissy manage to become an artist? Surely, judging from his memoirs he never drew and hardly had the strength left to draw after returning home late at night or at dawn, staggering from side to side like a drunk.

In this obsessed individual nothing specifically calls an artist to mind. I am not particularly surprised that he later became an eminent scholar, an experimenter in the natural sciences, and that he argued with the Catholic Church. Such a future, if you will, can be foreseen in his keen curiosity about the world, a curiosity assuaged by travelling around Europe. A young craftsman who, as a youth, walked into caves, quarries, and shafts and brought out various strange and wonderful things would, decades later, found the first natural science laboratory in Paris. He would make the startling pronouncement that fossils, in legendary eras, were plants and animals. But the artist—where was his artistic promise? Perhaps it was there, at the moment he sat motionless, captivated by the play of rays of sunlight upon the faience cup? Of course, one could explain the secret of Palissy's artistic gift by the particular atmosphere of the epoch—the mighty echo of the Renaissance was alive, though gradually growing fainter. The Renaissance had given rise to the "universal man". And surely the very best example was Leonardo da Vinci who had studied drawing and sculpturing since childhood. Leonardo was surrounded from his early years by the paintings and statues of the great artists. But what about Palissy?

There can be no doubt that if it were possible to talk with him Palissy would have laughed at our curiosity over his artistic talent, even though he was weak and lying on the straw in the darkness. If we were hanging on that rope ladder at his window we might hear him say, "Was I really an artist? I remained true to nature; the lizards, fish, leaves, and shells on my faience are in no way different from ones that exist in real life. It's not a matter of imagination—as it is for today's artists—but of reality. Your amazement is funny indeed...."

Palissy, of course, would have perfect right to laugh at our naïveté. He was true to nature in his technical craft. He glued leaves and shells on pewter dishes, arranged different fish and lizards on them and then made plaster impressions. But we, 400 years later, are not concerned with his technique. We stand before his work and see precious, genuine things of life. The fish, leaves and lizards seem *more* than alive. Palissy breathed life into them and they will live on forever.

Perhaps an artist lives in each of us and, should we discover one of the secrets of the world, we would *free* the artist in us. Discovering secrets of the world is discovering secrets in ourselves.

Let us take a last look at the eighty-year-old man in the corner of the dungeon. He has a particularly inspired expression on his face, it is one of the great faces created by Rembrandt.

But centuries have not remained on earth like castles. What happened to the sixteenth century with all its fires, astrologers' towers, cunning intrigues, restless roadways, jousting knights, and caravels? Where have the centuries gone?

The thoughts of Montaigne, pictures of Breughel, and faience of Bernard Palissy have remained. The courage of Miguel Serveto, too, has remained, for he would not change his convictions and was burned to death in Geneva. This kind of courage lived within an 80-year-old man who said to the King of France, in the Bastille, "I pity you."

## Marachev

Once in Podolsk, a town near Moscow, I went into a studio and saw a drawing that dumbfounded me. The studio was in a small room, crowded with plaster figures of ancient gods and heroes, figures strangely colored by the evening sun pouring in the high windows. In the mass of studio works, I found a drawing of the head of Aeschylus; for a long time, I could not tear myself away from it—it was both like and unlike the head that I remembered from my youth.

In museums and in art books I had seen the stern and, I thought, mute features of an old man filled with majestic thought. In this drawing, however, the face lost for an instant the solemnity that the world had seen from century to century, for two and a half thousand years—it was warmer, it smiled. I both did and did not recognize the great poet of the ancient world, author of the immortal tragedy of Prometheus, and it unwittingly occurred to me that the artist had not drawn from a dead plaster figure.

Who was he, that artist? I was told that he was a worker at one engineering plant, Dmitry Vasil'yevich Marachev, a smelter fascinated by painting and modelling. He was fifty; in the evenings, he worked in the studio alongside twenty-year-olds.

I wanted to meet him. As it turned out, he was in a hospital. So I went there. It was already evening. The duty doctor, learning my purpose, shrugged his shoulders:

"So you've found time to discuss painting with a sick man. He's in a bad way. But he draws all day". And he laughed dryly. "He's drawn all the patients, the nurses.... He draws from morning to evening! He'd done me.... Apparently, this is stronger than the pain." He frowned. "No, I won't let you see him...."

I asked him to pass on a letter, which I wrote then and there: I congratulated him on his fine drawing and wished him a speedy recovery.

After three weeks, I received an answer from Marachev. He reported briefly that he had signed himself out of the hospital, since he felt better. He was now on vacation, but if I wished I could find him in the laboratory of the smelting shop. He was working there on something especially valuable to him. What it was he didn't say.

I entered the laboratory and saw a lean man; he stood, half-turned, at a table, going through a notebook.

"I'd like to see Dmitry Vasilyevich."

"That's me."

"You?"

Later, I often returned in my mind<sup>to</sup> this first minute, and I could not clearly understand what had amazed me. His ordinariness? But hadn't I in fact expected to be met by an imposing man in velvet blouse and with artistically disordered hair! His face, possibly from dust in the air, seemed tired, unshaven. His blacksmith's hands seemed carved from rock, and incongruous in a youthfully thin figure, apparently desiccated by illness.

My amazement stemmed from the fact that I had come to see an artist. But the visage of the man at the table was not taken from an easel.

"You're interested in my work?" He looked me in the face with embarrassment and annoyance. "Let's go. You have to see this."

We left the laboratory, and went to the crimson fires of the furnaces. Workers, their faces covered with coal-black, charred earth, were hauling scoops of tender-red metal. It sloshed weakly, breathed—just as if alive. They cast it in moulds—sparks shot up. Thunder was all around.

"Yes," I said, looking at the play of light and shadow, "this is beautiful."

"Beautiful?" Marachev was astounded. "Are you kidding? This is repulsive! People should be working in snow-white shirts. And it should be so quiet that, well, you could hear music outside, a piano! Then it will really be beautiful..." He smiled, as if apologizing for the disparity between dream and reality, and went on to explain: "I had in mind an automated foundry. As you see, going to work we put on the oldest clothes. And they should be new, even festive. Work is a holiday! And the windows"—he pointed to something dark, ancient—"we should clean off the hundred-year-old smoke so that everything can be lighted by the sun."

We went on, carefully bypassing the scoops with molten metal, shying away from sparks. Shadows were dancing, the light waned and then burst out again, but I now knew that there was no beauty in all this. I had no sooner thought this than I began admiring the strong, rhythmic movements of a worker at a conveyer. Moving backwards, he rapidly and skilfully took the heavy moulds with both arms, put them on the slowly vibrating grating—the earthen form broke apart, the hot, rosy component, sliding down, fell out. The worker's right shoulder was raised powerfully, like that of a rower who is stubbornly turning a boat against a wave.

"Barbarism, barbarism," Dmitry Vasilyevich muttered behind me. And, taking me by the hand, turned me in another direction.

I saw a conveyer of exactly the same type, but no worker stood by the vibrating grating, the molds

were set on it automatically, by smooth, mechanical movement. It recalled the exertions of the human shoulder.

"You see, sometimes it's more beautiful without man," said my companion. "We will make all conveyers automated and he"—and we turned around again—"will not have to move tons of metal by hand." Dmitry Vasilyevich watched silently for a moment, then laughed: "How miraculously this is put together—the human body! It plays, it sings...." "I have drawn him," he said, admiring the worker. "It came upon me while I was drawing—the idea of the mechanical shoulder...."

"Wait a minute! Is that your automated part?..."

"Yes...."

"And it all began with a drawing?"

"The drawing helps. Often..."—he answered absent-mindedly. And he shook his head as though coming out of a dream. "Let's go, it's noisy..."

"I thought of substituting ceramic for earthen forms," he shouted in my ear as we went to the shop exit. "It's cheaper! And workers won't look like chimney-sweeps. And the components don't have to be cleaned of scales with a hammer, but by sound waves in a special bath! I want to increase the oxygen draught in the furnace. Maybe we can apply the mechanics of the whirlwind—the whirlwind is an astounding phenomenon. I read about it, I draw it, and, believe me, I'm sick at heart—it's real strength, after all! And it goes to waste in the desert...."

I couldn't refrain from a somewhat naïve, purely journalistic question:

"How did your interest in deserts begin?"

After the roar of the foundry, the quiet of the factory yard seemed profound, significant, full of the vibration of strings.

"You want me to tell you about my old comrade?" asked Dmitry Vasilyevich. "He was a good turner, and was all the time inventing, devising new bits as easy as can be. And nothing else in life



interested him. He drew a line and said—what's on the other side isn't for me. Well, once what he was working on didn't work out. He really sweated over it, got tired, and in the evening took his daughter to the zoo. They looked at tigers, elephants, apes, went on to the squirrels. A guide was at that very moment talking about the squirrels' teeth, how matchless they are—the more they are ground down by nuts, the sharper and stronger they become. My friend listened to this and began to think. A day later, he bought a squirrel, supposedly as a present for his daughter. And in imitation of a squirrel's tooth he developed a miraculous bit. What he had probably dreamed about his whole life. He did that, and he lost his calm, he became interested in everything, especially in the world of animals. He saw dinosaurs in his dreams! Everything engaged him now: waterfalls ... typhoons ... birds' flight.... And he worked better and better, with imagination. He invented as though he had wings! The turner hadn't died, a man had been born." Dmitry Vasilyevich fell silent, smiled: "Life, I think, is like a meadow with flowers, and our favorite pursuit is the beehive."

Coming to the factory in the morning, I had intended to talk with this man about Levitan and Roerich, Rembrandt and Picasso, portrait and genre painting. This was now beside the point. His attitude to life showed the artist in him, but in another, much broader sense than I had expected. Perhaps artist is the wrong word, and a new, more precise word does not yet exist.

"And what is your favorite thing in the meadow?" I asked.

His answer startled me:

"Music. The piano."

I looked at his hands—the hands of a blacksmith.

"Do you play?"

"The guitar."

"You probably began to work quite young?"

"As a boy, when I was twelve years old. I remember how we lifted streetcars with our bare hands..."

We came out onto a quiet street. It was growing dark—yellow light in the windows and snow become more sharply white were beautiful and disturbing, as in the pictures of old masters.

"As a boy, when I was twelve years old," repeated Dmitry Vasilyevich. "And I am still searching and inventing. Once I thought I was already living in communism. Yes! That was in our wood processing shop. Don't laugh. Tools for sharpening circular saws were in operation there—not complicated, but extraordinarily capricious. I think that any machine, even the most delicate, can be trained like a child. I was told to take care of those machines.... For a long time they wouldn't give in, then it was easy—I fixed them, repaired them, they became obedient. And so I had nothing to do—they worked all by themselves. So," and Dmitry Vasilyevich laughed, "I brought clay to the shop and began to mold figures of workers from nature. The machines hum, and I model or draw. One couldn't tell if this were a shop or a studio. And I think that under communism too, man will sit at the panel and, while the machines work, paint a portrait of his sweetheart or read Shakespeare or look at the heavens through a portable telescope—whatever is most interesting. And everything at this automated factory will be beautiful and rational, so that we will think well of what is most valuable. Rational and beautiful.... Tomorrow"—Dmitry Vasilyevich was developing his thought—"automation will be commonplace. Won't the worker be miserable when his hands have nothing to do? Put Stepan Levichev at the panel, for instance. Did you see him? He takes molds from the conveyer. I think he'll be miserable. But his soul is a buried treasure. It has to be dug up!..."

For a long time, we walked silently along the evening street. Then I said:

"Show me your drawings."

He introduced me to his wife and his engineer daughter in a small house at the edge of town. In the first room hung two pictures: a portrait in oil of his daughter and a copy of Aivazovsky's "The Ninth Wave". In the second room, on a table at which I was seated, were books and an open notebook. While the host looked for something behind my back in the closet, I quickly read the titles: *Automation, Foundry Work, Hydraulics, Ceramics, Aviation....* Unable to resist, I looked in the notebook—I saw a draft both fine and precise, with chiaroscuro; alongside, sparing lines: the composition of the charge of semi-permanent ceramic forms—graphite, corundum, powdered quartz....

"Here. Painted from nature. Autumn studies..." Dmitry Vasilyevich showed me some water-colors.

The colors were light and fresh. A birch with falling, grey-gold leaves.... An overgrown, green pond. A village street at sunset: a dark, almost black row of houses against a deep, bright orange sky. And a pencil drawing: night, a bonfire, the light, highlighted figures of youths, faces both laughing and sad.

"If you would, show me something else. Portraits would be good."

"I hardly have anything left here. I give them away.... If you like them, then, please, take them...."

He rummaged around in his closet and found a few drawings.

"Just sketches, nothing more...."

Before me were portraits of men done in water-color and pencil. A masculine, even severe face, with sharply outlined wrinkles, a bitter and resolute mouth.... Another face, also severe, but in the parched lips the promise of a smile.... And I suddenly understood that I was dealing with a genuine, talented artist, for whom there is nothing in the world closer and more important than man.

"I drew this in the hospital," he explained. "My room-mates."

I turned over the paper and saw a portrait of a doctor, apparently a surgeon—an exhausted face and, I would say, one that was sorrowfully happy, with large beads of sweat on the forehead.

"I often do doctors," said Dmitry Vasilyevich. "I take my sweet vengeance on them. You don't understand? Twenty-five years ago, misfortune came into my life.... I was in an automobile accident, I was almost killed. For ten days and nights I lay unconscious, on the eleventh night I came to, and heard on the other side of the partition a conversation—about me.—The male voice of the doctor stated firmly: 'I think he will live, but he will never work at full strength, let alone paint pictures.' And a woman wept softly—my wife.... I passed out, and came to again in the morning. Will I really, I wondered, go away without leaving people anything? And all this world and all its wealth is no longer for me? I was wrapped in bandages from head to toe, my body was alien, mute, only the heart was alive, was mine, it pounded in my throat. I didn't sign out of the hospital—I ran away, though my legs could scarcely move, and began to work, to think, to paint! They kept putting me back into the hospital, and I kept running away, once even through the window. Since then I draw doctors, it is my sweet vengeance on them for not believing that I would paint...." He slyly screwed up his eyes "Five years ago, I fell, lost consciousness, almost died. I was kept in bed until I felt better, and began to implore the doctor: 'Don't classify me as an invalid, I want to work!' She replied, with inexorable kindness in her voice: 'My good man, you don't have the strength.' I chiselled her likeness out of the hardest stone: there's my strength! I convinced her. And out of joy over their letting me stay at the factory, I almost went crazy—I devised a new method for processing wood with varnish, submitted a plan for

replacing the metal in presses with industrial porcelain, or for construction of a drum with reduced noise.... Then the most valuable came to me—the automated foundry.... Autumn was good!”

Then he showed me the last things he had at home: three “academic drawings”, executed in a studio “for self-improvement”. And the second made me forget everything else: the secretly smiling face of Aeschylus, apparently one of the variants of the drawing that had struck me.

“Have you ever read the tragedy of Prometheus?”

“It’s my favorite,” he answered. “I know it by heart. Not all the verses, of course....”

“Read some of it!...”

I suddenly had a crazy desire to hear, in this little home on the edge of a town near Moscow, the monologue in which Prometheus, chained in iron, challenges Zeus, speaks of his immeasurable love for people.

“I can’t” he objected, sternly. “It has to be read solemnly, with piano music in the background.”

“Read some now!...” I repeated. “Please.”

He took a guitar from the wall, sat down, lowered his head, carefully touched the strings.

“Lo, I am he  
Who, darkly hiding in a fennel reed  
Fountains of fire, so secretly purloined  
And gave to be the teacher of all arts  
And giver of all good to mortal men.”

He put his palm on the strings, quieting them.

“You are probably surprised that I know these verses by heart. Many years ago, I heard them on the radio in a difficult hour. They helped me turn outward to people. Later I understood that their sense is broader than my personal pain....”

He recited, strumming the guitar:

"Yet I dreamed not that here in this savage solitary gorge, on this high rock, I should waste away beneath such torments. Yet *câre* not to bewail these *présent* disasters; but descend to the earth, and hear of the woes to come...."

"Yes!" He raised his head, looked at me sternly, even solemnly. "The fire that Prometheus gave to people they have sheltered from the wind in their palms, and have brought it down to our time. And Lenin opened those palms, stoked the fire high, lit the whole Earth. Our job is that it flame higher and brighter...." He fell silent and smiled. "This Prometheus was a quite extraordinary man. He could do everything: mend wounds, build ships, deliver from physical labor.... He understood the science of numbers and the language of the muses. Everything!... He was like the Italian Leonardo da Vinci, or our own Mikhail Lomonosov." \*

He touched the string with his great, callused fingers, lowered his head, listening to the string's quiet song. And he became quite like an ordinary Russian workman, resting with a guitar after an exhausting day.

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\* M. V. Lomonosov—outstanding Russian scholar and encyclopedist of the eighteenth century, great materialist thinker and poet.—*Ed.*

## Drepalo

The south slopes of the range were still covered with snow. And though it was already May, the snow had thawed in the park itself not long ago. But the paths were swelling, coming to life again, though hardly anyone walked along them yet. The ever so slowly thawing park reminded me, more than the brisk air and dense snow, that we are high in the mountains—2,100 meters above sea level.

I felt the park only came to life in the evenings when lamp lights weren't burning, when the southern sky was bright, astir—as in a planetarium—and seemed to drop down closer and closer to the earth. In those hours the park was inhabited by reindeer, panthers, centaurs and women who looked like Nefertiti. Each time one could see something new, something that looked so alive one would expect to find footprints in the damp, black earth. Large volcanic rocks, scattered here and there in the park, took part in this game each evening. Like all rocks up in the mountains, they were worn by wind and rain into more or less distinguishable shapes: mythological creatures, real animals, people. And the more the ground thawed, the more I was fascinated by the rocks—not just in the evenings, but also in the morning. The rocks rested firmly, and even magnificently on the grass—now turning bright green, and under buds that were tiny bluish fists just opening up. The grey, uneven faces of the rocks, a thousand years old, accentuated the fleeting beauty of spring high up in the mountains. I found myself imagining how

striking and entirely fitting the texture of the rocks would be in summer when the roses in the park would be in bloom. And I saw more and more clearly that there was some design behind the precise and intelligent layout of the rocks.

Once I discussed this with the old man I saw on the damp paths every morning during my last days there. He was tall, thin, wiry and had a very dark, tan face. He threw his head and shoulders slightly back as he walked—quite a strange posture for an old man. I would often see him reaching up to touch the birch branches that were now so full of life, or squatting down to examine the earth with hands that were as dark and tan as his face.

"Aren't the rocks fascinating?" he laughed quietly, standing up. "They certainly are. But just 15 years ago you would have found them in a swamp."

"A swamp?" I said, not understanding. "What did you do, drag them here from a swamp?"

After having a good laugh, the old man took a few deep breaths and looked at me seriously, but with a hint of irony: "And would you really drag them out of a swamp? Then we would have dragged them out of here, willingly..." He shrugged his shoulders in dismay and then added with a laugh, "But things turned out for the best anyway. Without the rocks the park wouldn't be the same. Right? And if someone were about take them out of here right now I would defend them, just as I would defend the trees. By the way, look over here..." He led me farther down the path in a few bold strides. "This is a fir tree!"

I found myself wondering why he had dragged me there, for there were fir trees in the place where we had been talking. "You mean this one?" I asked, touching a tree that looked no different from the rest. "What's special about this one?"

"There is nothing special about it," the old man answered with unexpected abruptness. "It is a very



typical silver fir tree. Four of us came here: me, my wife, and two trees—a fir and a birch. The trees are alive—this one and the other one I'll show you later on."

I suddenly realized that he was quite old, over seventy, but I could not have guessed it from his face, his hands, or his walk. I could tell by his voice, by the way he said that the trees, which originally made up the park, were still alive.

When he laughed his voice was quite young; his laugh somehow brought new life to him. But he was not laughing now, and I detected his seventy years.

"Then, when this was a swampy area, there was no town near here?" I asked.

"A town!" he laughed. "There was only that little house over there—the two-storey forestry building. Botanists gathered there from all over the country...."

"Why?"

"Why!" he exclaimed sadly, surprised at how little I knew. With a toss of his head he looked all around him as though he were returning to the immediate reality that had been lost for a moment, as though he was reassuring himself that we were standing in a park that was just coming to life, rather than in the swamp. "Well," he said with an incongruous, almost childlike smile, "you certainly haven't heard about the star...."

I waited silently for an explanation.

"Does one dare set a star afire if everyone knows that it will die out, that it will never stay aflame?..." he said slowly, as though remembering lines of verse long forgotten. But just then some women, who were unpacking boxes of seedlings, called him. He bowed with all the grace of olden times and quickly walked off in their direction. I heard his laugh from afar and the wind carried back the marvellous smell of bast matting. He left, leaving me with the feeling a child has when he discovers a book without beginning or end, a book which, as if

in spite, seems terribly interesting no matter what page one might open it to.

It warmed up rather quickly, and more and more of the southern slopes turned a rich, dark color. Now I saw the old man working in the park every day. He and several women tilled the soil and planted seedlings and bulbs. They seemed to be conjuring up something, planning something. I tried many times to resume our conversation, but he was busy and only gave abrupt answers that were not to the point, as if brushing aside my questions. "Tomorrow we'll have roses, the day after there'll be seedlings once again." Or "Tomorrow there'll be barren land beyond the spring; the day after tomorrow there'll be dahlias." He kept repeating "Tomorrow ... the day after tomorrow..." Since I had not managed to find out his real name, I dubbed him "Old Tomorrow-After-Tomorrow".

Of course, I found out his name later on—his real name is Kirill Sergeyevich Drepalo. But I still continued to think of him as Old Tomorrow-After-Tomorrow. And the more details I learned of his life, the more I liked this made-up name, the name of a would-be fairy-tale hero. Before then he had spent years planting forests in high mountain regions. With his fir trees, pines, and birches Old Tomorrow-After-Tomorrow had worked his way up to 1,600 meters above sea level. Therefore, he was selected for a unique mission: to create one of the finest parks in the republic, and perhaps in the country, at 2,000 meters above sea level. Thus the future of the high mountain settlement of Dzhermuk (which literally means "Hot Springs") and whether it would be a resort ranking as one of the best in the Soviet Union or, perhaps, in the world, depended to a great extent upon whether the park could be created. In chemical content, the waters of Dzhermuk differ little from the rare and excellent medicinal quality of the Karlovy Vary springs in

Czechoslovakia. But the springs, by themselves, were not enough. A whole town had to be built, a town with sanatoria, restaurants, theaters, streets, shop windows, lights... It was possible to build at such an altitude, but was it possible to create a park—a park that could embody the spirit of the whole town?

Imagine for a moment the allegorical figures of Economy, Aesthetics and Ethics. It seems to me now that they were standing here awaiting the decision of their fate, at a dismal swamp full of thousand-year-old volcanic rock. I mentioned Economy first, thinking of her tempting economic plans to establish a huge world-famous resort. But Ethics was actually the central figure, embodying the incomparable virtue and joy of healing. Thus, these figures stood at the swamp while the real botanists met in a real little house to discuss whether one dares set a star afire if everyone knows that it will die out, that it will never stay aflame. Then, some time later, Old Tomorrow-After-Tomorrow came along with his wife and two trees, a fir and a birch.

The botanists at the conference addressed themselves to two questions. The first was quite specific: can a vast park, consisting of hundreds of precious species of trees and plants, be created at this altitude and in this particular area? The majority of the scholars expressed serious and justifiable doubts: the plants will not be able to bloom in the fleeting warm spell and without the plants, the park will lose all beauty and variety.

The second question was more abstract: is it worth devoting colossal energy to a swamp full of volcanic rock 2,100 meters above sea level, to create something that will be alive two and a half to three months a year? What about the rest of the time? In metaphorical terms, this question suggests the image of a star which....

My attitude toward Old Tomorrow-After-Tomorrow and his work could also be divided into

these two questions, one concrete and one abstract. I have no great faith in the version telling how when throngs of scholars say "No", the average forester just goes ahead and carries out the task, the "Yes!". Basically, I treat such stories as legends, the product of the imagination of local folklorists inspired by the colorful figure of Old Tomorrow-After-Tomorrow.

The second question interests me far more, the abstract question about the star. In my opinion it is one of the most profound and eternal of philosophical questions, and it arose long before philosophy itself. This question, though unconsciously, tormented our legendary ancestors who tried to kindle a flame by rubbing two sticks together. With tired and sweaty palms, they seriously wondered if it wouldn't be better just to wait till lightning struck and set the dry branches of the nearest tree ablaze. Doubts such as this one have arisen for thousands of years, but fortunately that's all they are because each time man has found the strength within himself to rise above them.

In deciding that there would indeed be a park, Old Tomorrow-After-Tomorrow answered the following questions: What is the meaning of life? What are the highest goals of human existence?

One does indeed dare to set a star afire because once the fire has gone out, the star will catch fire again, anew. Naked rationalism, which measures energy expended against immediate results does not and never will understand this great "again".

The late spring high in the mountains echoed in the waterfalls and brought the park to life. So far only the early colors of spring had appeared: green—the grass and the conifers, and black—the earth. But shapes and forms were already there—circles, squares and the play of delicate lines—for they came before the colors. One felt the moment would soon arrive when the fullness of life would be manifest in brilliant colors.

With the hardest time of planting now over, Kirill Sergeyevich became a bit more talkative. He told me he had managed to get some well-fertilized earth from high mountain pastures and that he had gotten some long-awaited seeds for a hearty strain of gladioli from distant seed beds.

As the sounds of spring grew louder, violets began blooming along the southern face of the mountain range. Huge poppies (bright poppies like those of Martiros Saryan)\* were about to bloom. Everything was going well. Old Tomorrow-After-Tomorrow was rushing about the park, performing his magic, laughing. But at that time, when no one expected it, misfortune struck. A low cloud came down across the eastern ridge of the mountains and the skies grew dark. Snow began to fall at evening and turned into a snowstorm by morning—white, cruel, dry. The temperature fell to ten below zero Centigrade. Winter had returned in the last days of May.

Outside my window was an impenetrable whiteness. I stood there thinking of Old Tomorrow-After-Tomorrow. I sensed the merciless truth, the utter helplessness of a star buffeted by the icy backstrokes of the howling wind. The storm raged on and had I believed in evil powers I would have come to the conclusion that it was the wicked trickery of Mephistopheles, who had no peace after Faust decided to drain the swamp. As Mephistopheles said,

“Before thee naught but ruin lies;  
The elements are our allies....”

I had no thought at all of going outdoors in my light trench coat. So, I sat before the white window waiting for the storm to die down and listened to a story. It was a story that could have been pulled out

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\* Martiros Saryan is a Soviet Armenian artist.—*Ed.*

of an old, tattered, read and reread volume of Hans Christian Andersen's stories. It was the story of how the town of Dzhermuk celebrated Old Tomorrow-After-Tomorrow's birthday each year. As I listened I saw, in my mind's eye, a donkey—it somehow appeared right in the midst of the storm—adorned with armloads of flowers. The donkey, a living garden indeed, had a sweet and gentle face. It led a whole procession which was so strikingly picturesque, bright and unusual that it captured my thoughts for several moments. I forgot all about the storm. Children carrying roses, dahlias, asters, gladioli, and men, women and elderly people followed the donkey. They had set out for the park. Tables had been put up in a shaded lane so that everyone could drink a toast to Old Tomorrow-After-Tomorrow.

When this vision evaporated, the window again became totally white. The man who had been telling me about Kirill Sergeyeovich's birthdays was the mayor of Dzhermuk, Zaven Georgiyevich Vartanyan. I said to him frankly, and not tactfully, "All this is so beautiful. It's not like the real world."

"It's not like the real world?" he repeated. "But then what has he done that is like the real world?"

"If you will, it's more like a miracle," I agreed.

"You don't believe it?" he looked me in the face, understanding. "Well, you're not the only one. It certainly isn't easy to believe it: an ordinary old forester turns out to be smarter than the experts. But he isn't smarter, the miracle does not come from the mind, but from love. They are smarter because they planned everything and studied the altitude, the growing season, direction of the winds, the caprices of nature.... But there are things which are difficult to calculate and plan. I read about an Englishman—it was in newspapers all over the world—who in his sixties sailed around the world in a small ship.... Of course, this deserves great respect because it shows you and me what a person

is capable of. But what is even greater is for a man in his sixties to leave his own home, his native forest, to come up here and do the impossible. Isn't it funny that an impossibility actually consist of everyday possibilities! He goes to bed at midnight and gets up at six each morning to write off to all the gardens in the country and gather seeds and shoots to build an excellent hothouse. And before this, before the hothouse came into being, he dragged the rocks here without any machinery, with his bare hands, to conquer the swamp. What seems impossible is conquered by love for one's country, for man. The park is in bloom two and a half or perhaps three months a year, but even the rest of the time it is still the main attraction of our town. That's the power it has and that's why we celebrate Kirill Sergeyvich's birthday as a great town holiday. It's been going on for three years now, since his seventieth birthday when he was congratulated by all of Armenia—from the Council of Ministers to small forestries.

About two days later the evil forces died down. But snow still lay on the ground, melting slowly. Now the park had three colors: white, green, with a little bit of black.

The old man bent down, stuck his hands into the earth that was coming to life. I felt sure I would see a distressed, noticeably aged face, but he smiled broadly at me from a distance, calming my fears.

And suddenly I thought that perhaps it was his grandmother who had been exiled from Kherson by Catherine the Great and who came to Armenia, brought her family; it took three years to get here on foot. And now he was at age seventy-four in our speeded-up, frantic age, high up here with his trees.

"We'll plant new seedlings," he shouted to me, "and tomorrow we'll unwrap the roses!"

"And the day after?" I said, trying to smile.

"Yes, there will be a day after," he said sternly, without a smile.

## Andersen

He has been after me for months. No matter where I went or what I was doing, a nervous, lanky old man followed right behind me at a quick, uneven pace. In his lifetime people usually thought his face ugly—they saw only his hooked nose, thin lips and large mouth. Hans Christian Andersen laughed a lot, and he cried a lot too. His tears were not caused by pain or grief, but by great beauty and true humanity. When he saw something beautiful his face lit up, and at such moments one would not notice his large nose or thin lips. As the Soviet poet Nikolai Zabolotsky wrote, one gives no thought to the outside of a vessel if a magic flame flickers within.

The first time I opened one of Andersen's books was long, long ago, when I was a boy. The second time was when I was bringing up my daughter. I think that they are the kind of books one has to read many times, in childhood and then again and again after a number of years. The depth of their meaning is deceptive, for just when one thinks that he has gotten to the bottom of the stories, there are still undiscovered lands hidden far below.

Hans Christian Andersen was the first author in world literature to take the fairy tale out of the setting of kings' and knights' castles, picturesque woodcutters' huts, and poetic, dark, dense forests. He placed the fairy tale in his present-day setting—typical cities and villages, the average home and family. He decisively and boldly merged the fairy tale with the everyday.



Chekhov used to say that in a good play, people's lives can go to pieces or else future happiness can be assured—while characters sit around the dinner table. In Andersen's stories it is while people sit around exchanging views on the news in the evening paper or when they set up card tables that something new, strange and extraordinary occurs. A man puts on a pair of galoshes left by some good fairies and then goes out on the street and discovers that the world is far more fascinating and intricate than it had seemed back in his own comfortable living room.

I spent many an evening reading my daughter Andersen's fairy tales, and I had the feeling that there was more to them than I saw at first. Then it struck me that it wasn't the stories—there was more *to life itself* than I had realized before. From that moment on Andersen became my constant companion. He accompanied me on my way to work, whenever I was travelling by train or by plane, and he even sat right beside me in the editorial office. And now my daughter and I are vacationing in a tiny southern town, and Andersen is here, too.

Being so close to Andersen has brought a new excitement into my life. The most trivial, inconsequential things have suddenly come to life and taken on a new fascination. I saw a chestnut that had a most irregular shape. I picked it up, noticing that it looked as though on one side there was the figure of a little boy, resting his head on his knees. I immediately thought what a wonderful story my companion could make of such a thing. He would demonstrate once again that one needn't board an icebreaker or a spaceship to discover unexplored lands and new worlds. All one has to do is to look down, look around oneself. But perhaps Andersen's story might have too strong an effect on the inhabitants of tiny southern towns. In autumn, when chestnuts begin to fall, the inhabitants might be late for work because they would be forever

stopping along the way, picking up chestnuts, the little, brownish, magic chestnuts lying on the sidewalks. Why not? Andersen's contemporaries have told how people who had read his fairy tale about the street light would suddenly stop when they saw an old street light. They would stare at it, transfixed, as though it were something entirely new and unfamiliar, though they had hurried past it thousands of times before.

"La vieille lanterne" is truly a unique story. The farther one goes into it, the more one feels that there is much more to reality than meets the eye. Do you recall the story? A reliable old light was no longer able to dispel the darkness. The watchman who had lit the light every night for many years—in rain, snowstorms, and clear summer evenings—took it home with him one evening. He and his wife did not want to part with this old friend so they put the lamp in the basement by the fire, and took good care of it. But the street light was unhappy, unhappy because he could no longer share his gift with other people. The last night that he had lit up the empty street, the wind, night, sky and distant stars gave the street light a rare gift—the ability to show those he loved whatever he remembered and had seen himself. And now as he listened in the evenings to the old couple reading aloud stories about Africa, the street lamp was sad for he could have covered the drab basement walls with vivid, marvellous pictures of tropical forests—if only his masters had thought to light the lamp once again.

It is difficult to try to retell a fairy tale, for with every word one risks losing a grain of the magic of the story. Thus it would be better just to give one's personal impressions than to go into the plot. I was not particularly touched by the fact that life gave the street lamp a magic gift—all sorts of things happen in fairy tales! But I was touched by the human torment the lamp had to endure because he could not use his gift, he could not show the beauty

of life to the people he cared for. Often invisible, this beauty lies far below the surface, awaiting discovery.

Hans Christian Andersen was far more fortunate than the old street lamp, for he had the ability to see the wonder of life as well as to show it to children and adults. The special charm of Andersen's street light, if one can express it in just one word, is *goodness*.

One realizes that the sources of human goodness are limitless. Entering Andersen's magic world, one thinks first of all about the *wonder of life* rather than the miracle of goodness. And perhaps this is even better.

One need not fear the naïveté of a child, for great wisdom is often hidden within it. Do you remember Andersen's tale about the mice who set off into the world to learn how to make soup out of some pathetic little pieces of sausage? One of the mice found himself in a kingdom of elves. These merry little creatures decorated the sausage with garlands and ribbons and then sang and danced around it. Then they removed the garlands and ribbons and gave it back to the mouse. Once again it was a pathetic, little piece of sausage, but now it was enchanted. At the whim of its owner violets would spring up out of the sausage and soft sweet music could be heard all around.

I think that for Andersen himself, the sausage was the symbol of life. Life can seem grey and monotonous, but bear within itself rare gifts which will be realized if we are but worthy of them. Andersen viewed life as an endless wonder and this gave rise to particular ethical views. Thus the ethics of not only great thinkers but average people depends on one's conception of the world and attitude toward it. But before I go into ethics I would like to talk once again about how Andersen understood the world. I am not afraid, here, of waxing sentimental, for it is this fear that often makes life less rich and more remote.

For Andersen, dancing flowers express the subtle nuances of human feelings. The wind, rocks, and bells tell people wondrous stories of olden times; a fir tree waits, hopes and experiences joy and sorrow. And birds! Especially storks.... Andersen's is a spiritual world of mountains, rivers, different lands—just as it is the spiritual world of our own Russian authors: Pushkin, Tyutchev, Blok....

It is man who brings this spirituality into the world. But what is man's spirituality? Is it not, after all, the marvellous reflection of the sounds, substance and vitality of the material world about us? Is it not the promise of even more wonderful discoveries yet to come?

We can imagine the consecutive development of life on our planet simply by looking at the physical world: rocks, ferns, deer, man. It took millions of years for life to rise but one degree higher. In Andersen's stories, bright magic takes the place of this enormous labor; the characters—rocks, trees, animals—easily break through the "ceiling" above their heads and rise to new, higher and more complex forms of existence. And this stirs the reader's natural yearning to also break through that "ceiling", to let bright magic take the place of the thousand years' labor of the sun, a labor which makes life on earth all the more complex. This yearning is expressed mainly by the need to feel things more deeply, to see farther. For the more perfect and complex the living organism, the broader the scope of its feelings and the more varied, detailed and subtle is its perception of the world.

In the opinion of several contemporary scholars, there is a high probability that more complex forms of life on other inhabited planets have sense organs and sensibilities unknown to man. They also state that it is not at all surprising that many characteristics of objective reality are at present inaccessible to us because our sense organs are limited.

The story of Pythagoras hearing the "harmony of the universe" has become a legend handed down through the ages. His formula, "the music of heavenly spheres" has turned into a beautiful metaphor. But today's physicists have ascertained with scientific precision that our planet is actually submerged in an ocean of the music of the cosmos—supersensitive equipment interprets it as the waves of a giant ocean. If we had perfect hearing we could hear the quiet music of the universe.

The miracle of life—man will gain a more varied and fuller perception of it in 100 years, a thousand, a million.... Andersen tried to master the new fullness, the new diversity. And tearing oneself away from his books, one too will see and feel what previously had not been felt, had not been noticed in objective reality.

But Andersen's fairy tales not only tell us that reality contains incomparably more than we can see and hear at the present time. His tales inspire faith that in time new, amazing truths will come to light. Some day man will leave his home, set off on his way to work, and will hear the strange gentle music of the "heavenly spheres".

The childish impressionable, spirited author who seemed naïve and sentimental 100 years ago awaits us, the children who have been spoiled by the miracles of the third quarter of the twentieth century. He awaits us in the "no man's land" that separates our amazing present from the still more fantastic future. On our earth there is a group of confident individuals who have exacting minds, people who not only have imagination, but also mathematical tools of research. They are always able to keep abreast with the ever-developing natural sciences. And right beside them stands a nearsighted, squinting, "old-fashioned" Hans Christian Andersen.

I saw him there, the first time in a group of present-day scholars who were listening to a

famous astro-physicist. The astro-physicist was telling a large audience of Moscow University about the possible forms of life on other planets. It was a rather dry, but well-argued and fascinating narrative presented by a scholar with an exacting mind. The astro-physicist suggested that life on planets X, Y and Z has much in common with life on the planet Earth. This must be so because all the points in the Universe which we study have one and the same chemical structure, governed by the same laws. If by some miracle we should at this moment find ourselves not in an auditorium of the university, but on another planet—identical to ours in temperature, age, form—then we probably would not find its biological development incomprehensible or strange in any way. Our surprise would be no greater should we find ourselves in the Carboniferous Period of our planet when colossal lizards ruled land and sea. "But," the scholar smiled, "amidst life so similar to that of our earth, we would all the same undergo a terrific psychological and moral shock."

At that moment I saw Andersen.

The astro-physicist, to my amazement, began to retell one of Andersen's best stories, "The Little Mermaid". He was not, of course, talking about the love of the charming daughter of the sea for a son of the earth. He was involved with other aspects which he revealed to us.

In Andersen's fairy tale, life on the sea bottom was like that on earth. The mermaids lived in a palace surrounded by gardens. The trees in the gardens were unlike trees on earth only in that the slightest movement of the water would stir the branches and leaves as if they were alive. In the palace and the gardens there were also many real things from the earth—debris of shipwrecks. A white marble statue of a boy, which had fallen from some sailing vessel, stood surrounded by flowers, red flowers like the distant sun. Older mermaids often told young mermaids who did not yet have

the strength to rise from the depths of the sea, about people, about the life above. And the young mermaids dreamed of the day they too would be able to see the world above.

The astro-physicist noted derisively, "In this sense they differ very little from you and me, the only difference being that for us shapeless meteorites falling from above take the place of the marble statue of the boy."

When the young mermaids reach fifteen years of age they are allowed to go up to the surface of the sea. They see a world not unlike the one under the sea: wild swans recall large fantastic fish and the icy mountains of winter are but enormous pearls. ("One feels that both worlds are governed by one and the same laws.") But at the same time this world arouses the imagination of the mermaids. They view it, especially at first, as a great novelty, the unusual. In the town music is playing, lights are shining, bells ringing.... In a small bay children sing, splash one another....

"But," said the astro-physicist, shrugging his shoulders, "once they have received permission to swim anywhere they wish, their fascination quickly wanes. After a few weeks they state that the world on the surface of the sea is good, but the underwater world is better, it's home. It is quite likely," he said, concluding this unexpected excursion into Andersen's fairy tale, "that in the future you and I will find ourselves in the same succession of emotional states." Then he returned to the possible life forms on planets X, Y and Z, treating them once again in dry, exacting terms. But one sensed that he felt confined in dealing only with planets X, Y and Z, with life that reminds us of our own earth. He began talking about the possibility of other suns, that are more blue or red than our yellow sun and that may exist in the countless other galaxies. The spectrum of these suns emits waves that probably give rise to different form of life.

What do these forms look like? No doubt we would be utterly amazed to see a full-grown tree that pulls up its roots from time to time to move on to richer soil, or on the other hand, to see an animal send roots down into the soil and gain nourishment through photosynthesis. Is such a fantastic kingdom of highly organized life—neither plant nor animal—possible?

I almost broke out laughing, but it would have been rude in a packed university auditorium. Andersen's old oak tree came to my mind. It was the wonderful old oak that had a dream which Andersen captured in one of his fairy tales. Once, in a dream, the oak pulled its roots out of the ground and....

Yes, he was excited about the possibility of a different, fantastic form of life. And now I learn from the astro-physicist that this form of life is probably not fantastic but real, in strange and distant worlds warmed by blue and red suns. But for such a probability to seem plausible a hundred years would have to pass, a hundred years in which people's way of thinking, perception of the world, understanding of the fantastic and the real would be changed. And for us, a 100-year's time can hold the seemingly improbable: Einstein and the founder of Soviet cosmonautics, Tsiolkovsky, quantum mechanics and bionics, the atom and the cosmos.

I nearly laughed for joy over Andersen, but restrained myself out of respect for the silence of the university auditorium. But it seemed to me that at that moment Andersen himself was laughing as he stood behind the astro-physicist. And, bowing his heavy, old head, he stood there behind the rostrum—tall, boyishly awkward, with his large forehead—folding on to the rostrum and quietly laughing. He was laughing about what the nineteenth century, the iron age, had termed a rational attitude toward life, and what the twentieth, the atomic age, called realistic thought. God only knows what the twenty-first century will call



this age-old desire to shield heart and mind from the inexhaustible, eternal, complex mystery of existence that demands the highest efforts of the human spirit.

This very desire existed in Andersen's native Denmark even in the days of the treacherous King Claudius. It was then that Hamlet, in Elsinore, objected to the bold and honest, but exceedingly rational and realistic-minded Horatio saying:

*"There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, Than are dreamt of in your philosophy."*

Had Andersen not feared in his lifetime to use elevated, solemn words, he might have repeated Hamlet's famous reproach, directing it to many of his compatriots and contemporaries who, at best, heard in his fairy tales only the voice of a pure and innocent heart.

In that big auditorium it made me happy to think that through the centuries there have been fewer and fewer Horatios, and more and more Hamlets. And perhaps Andersen was laughing behind the rostrum, behind the back of the respected astro-physicist, because Andersen also felt that the limited wisdom of Horatio was not determining the frame of mind of this auditorium!

In essence, I had already begun to answer a question which I am able to formulate only now: Why is it that modern physicists, mathematicians, and cyberneticians, in an effort to find the imaginative ways of expressing the "mad ideas" of our century, readily turn to Andersen who was neither a scholar nor a philosopher? (I was quickly convinced that the astro-physicist, who summarized "The Little Mermaid" to support and illustrate a number of serious ideas on the possible life forms of other planets, was guided not only by the personal sympathy for the Danish author, but also by considerations that were more substantial and held in common by many scholars. In the involved and fascinating books of the creators of cybernetics, the promising young science of the mid-twentieth

century, one can see anew the imagery of "The Tinder Box" or "The Staunch Tin Soldier".) But what does all this mean and why is Andersen so important today?

I had begun to answer this question, even before I could put it into words, when I began speaking of Hamlet's notion about the inexhaustible, complex, eternal mystery of existence. To a great extent Hamlet's perception of the world is characteristic of his countryman, Andersen. He saw the greatest metamorphosis, a subject worthy of a fairy tale, in man's ability to begin to see beauty, diversity, and fullness in a world which a minute ago seemed grey and humdrum. Before Andersen, there were different fairy-tale metamorphoses: an evil spell could turn a prince into a beast or a little frog could become a charming princess by casting off an evil spell.

But Andersen saw the greatest magic in the sharp change of man's inner world, the change from a limited to a limitless world, the change from Horatio to Hamlet.

It is this very metamorphosis that is treated in one of his novellas, "*Les galoches du bonheur*". A police clerk happened to put on a pair of boots left behind by a good fairy. The clerk did not know that the boots had a magic power — they could fulfil any wish their owner might have. Then the clerk, a most ordinary soul, met a young poet in the park. He was struck by the poet's joy of life, his care-free attitude and wished he would become more closely acquainted with such individuals and perhaps even become a poet himself. At that moment, though the clerk was not aware of it, he began to see life the way a poet does — thanks to the enchanted boots.

Elaborating upon the new inner state of the clerk, Andersen presents the logic behind the birth of a poetic perception of the world. At first the policeman is only amazed at how wonderful a day it is with all its beauty, freshness and poetry. He feels more and more sharply the enchantment and

diversity of clouds, trees, grass. This is the first stage of a new attitude toward the world; it is important, but if the magic of the boots were limited only to this, their magic would not be on a par with the pen of Hans Christian Andersen. After this first step came a second—more precisely, after the first *turn* came a second, a third.... Thus the clerk did not climb up a staircase, but explored the depths of the world.

As we come to the second turn, there is a marvellous, purely Andersenian detail: the names and faces of kind people the clerk had forgotten in the humdrum of everyday life clearly came into his mind. And later unknown to the clerk, his recollection of human goodness turned into detailed and diverse pictures of life, into a most fertile imagination. It was summer but he felt himself to be a little boy again, sitting before an icy window looking at ships stuck in the ice of the canal.... Then he saw spring—the sailors were merrily tarring the ships and doing all the necessary repair work. Then came the day when the ships were to set out for lands across the sea and he became excited for he too wanted to sail off far, far away.

And the magic of the boots kept on working. Awakened by the magic power, the policeman bent down, picked a daisy, the tiny flower. In just a minute's time the daisy told him more than one could learn in several lectures on botany. The daisy told him about the wonders of the sun and the air, and the clerk (now he was not a clerk but a poet) thought about life, life which arouses in man strengths and feelings unknown to him. A little boy who was playing not far away began splashing water about with a stick. The water splashed up into the air around the boy. The clerk suddenly thought of the millions of living, unknown organisms sent up into the air with the drops of water, up to what must have been dazzling altitudes in relations to their own size. It was probably akin to what he would have felt above the clouds.... The tiniest

aspects of the world told him, the poet for the day, about things that had been cut off entirely from the police clerk. These were the turns in the road to a poetic perception of reality.

Had the clerk known more about the world, would he have wished, once he put on the magic boots, to become a scholar rather than a poet? If so, I think that nothing would have happened differently, for a scientific cognition of reality begins precisely with poetic mastery of reality, with the amazing feeling that a tiny, ordinary daisy exists in the same huge, complex world along with galaxies and nebula, that a daisy is born under the same laws that created the mysterious Andromeda nebula. In content, a drop of water is an entire ocean.

When Albert Einstein was four years old he was given a compass. He was struck by the predictable behavior of the needle of the compass, its mysterious dependence on something unconnected and unseen. He felt that *there must be something deeply hidden behind the things he saw*. And thus, feeling this way, he too was a poet. Many years later he became a scholar. A man, examining reality, embraces the whole history of human thought, comprizing centuries into minutes.... In the beginning there were paintings on rock and later came the first guesses about the structure of the world.

I think that this is a clue to understanding why physicists and cyberneticists who have learned so much from the great discoveries and unprecedented achievements in science, turn today to Hans Christian Andersen. His fairy tales were a first attempt at poetic reflection of a world of great new possibilities, of strength previously unknown, of unanticipated metamorphoses, amazing consistencies and wondrous riddles. This is the "strange world" about the inevitability of which scholars and popularizers of science in our day write solid books.

Much of what Andersen wrote was not understood by his contemporaries or was viewed only as

play of a poetic imagination cut off from life. They wanted the world of his books to be governed by the same laws that were in the real world around them and any seeming incogruity irritated them. But Andersen's world was governed by the laws of the real world of *tomorrow*, by laws whose impact would only become apparent a century later.

The great Danish physicist, Hans Christian Oersted, whose works on electromagnetism had already become classics in Andersen's day, understood all this and loved Andersen. Once, in passing, he made a comment that was paradoxical to the people of that day: though Andersen was often accused of having too little knowledge, science would perhaps owe a greater debt to him than to any other poet.

Life has solved this riddle. Andersen's fairy tales have turned out to be not only elegant poetry, but full of wisdom. The miracle of life is ever changing, taking on different forms and new strengths. It is when we experience the wonder of life that true goodness arises. The old trusty street light tells us that if we want our children to grow up into good people, we must teach them to understand life as the miracle of miracles.

I want Andersen to be by my side a while longer. Why? Perhaps to try—not to solve, but to think through one more riddle. To his contemporaries Andersen seemed extremely old-fashioned. The Danish philosopher Kierkegaard saw him as a humorous poetic character who had leapt out of a book of verse and forgotten, for all time, the secret of how to get back up on the shell again. People around Andersen made fun of him and sometimes got annoyed with what, in their opinion, was his oversensitivity. Goodness and beauty would bring tears to his eyes and thus he was often ecstatically happy; he could stand for hours before a budding tree or a nest of storks; he would cry when he listened to his favorite music. He should, in fact, have been looked upon as strange and out-of-place

as the nineteenth century, the iron age, gathered momentum.

Railroads united the towns while ships steamed along backwater riverways. In Paris construction of the Eiffel Tower was begun—the wonder of the century, and the telegraph came into being. Sober, business-like people, utterly deprived of human feeling became proprietors of life. But a poetic character who had come to life, was walking the street of the Danish capital. How out-of-the-times he was, is only too obvious.

Why is it that a man who was viewed as old-fashioned and strange in the iron age, the mid-19th century, should seem *appropriate* and contemporary to the atomic age, the mid-20th century? And he seems this way not merely as a writer, sensitive to the incomparable diversity of life, but as a person, a *personality*. Can it be that what puzzles us about Andersen is the riddle of *our own* age? I, myself, want to find the answer to this last riddle.

## Encke

Returning from a summer journey, we stopped in Tallinn one day and, having run around the old town, had learned by evening that a new museum had been opened in the restored ruins of a Dominican monastery.

I remember those ruins well. Their vivid severity disturbed the imagination. Grey, grave, pitted stone—falling into ruins, it held in secret the spirit of the thirteenth century. Earlier in Tallinn, I had many times tried but had been unable to find in the rock even the slightest, knife-thin crack.

The restoration of this complex, the oldest in Tallinn, was, so Estonian architects and historians told me, an exciting and creative affair. "Imagine a lesson on the history of the thirteenth-fifteenth centuries given within walls built in that period! Do you have children? A daughter? Just think about the fullness of a living feeling for history.... Only a minimal amount of work is needed for this—you don't build, you discover."

So my daughter and I ran, not walked. Only minutes remained until the museum closed, but we showed our tickets for a morning plane to the elderly, stern women who protected this grave, gloomily dusking mysteriousness, and they let us in. The stone, poised, angrily pressed us further, further: into chapels, refectories, passage ways, bed chambers.... It was as though, yearning for sky, for windows, we elbowed the stone apart and, when we came to two windows coppered by the August evening, we felt something like the joy of liberation.

Of course, we could have taken pleasure in them at a distance of some feet and quickly returned, remembering that stern women, a last evening in Tallinn, and a morning flight awaited us. Then I would not have met Master Encke, and my understanding of modern man would be, surely, poorer than it is now.

My daughter was first to the window:

"Look! It's just like Andersen...."

And I saw below us a little courtyard, with large trees. There were happy homes for squirrels on comfortable branches; here and there lanterns and feeding troughs on narrow, gracefully wrought chains swayed from a light breeze.

The lanterns especially pleased us: a great authenticity was felt in them. If it weren't for them, the court might seem merely decorative. The lamps, of copper, thick glass and with irreproachably precise form, gave it a sort of credibility. From the gloom of the monastery, we entered into the living world of our childhood — also secret, but good. It was before us, at the very windows and, as it turned out later, at the same time fantastically distant, from the point of view of physical distance. Only after an hour, having left behind the heavy, heaped-up stone, having struck out through the streets of the old town, did we find it. In the sunset with the lanterns already lit, it seemed right out of Andersen.

Looking around, we saw on the left steps leading down into a crypt—primitive stones, with a rope for a bannister. Of course, not restraining ourselves, we descended and, having crossed the threshold, found ourselves in a picturesque dungeon. Shelves ran around the walls, and there were lanterns on them, shining dimly of copper. Then we saw a table in the corner, a table piled with drawings, a mass of different, mysterious instruments, and a man. He had probably stood watching us in the shadow, and he now approached. In his smile and in his face, there was not a shadow of surprise, as though he had been waiting for us in



particular and was now happy that we had come as we had promised. But he could not have expected us, so I tried to explain: "We saw from the windows of the monastery's bed chamber...." But, laughing either at my embarrassment or at his own memories, he stopped me with raised hand and open palm, also shining of copper:

"Yes, yes, the monks, they kept food and drink there"—he indicated the stones of the floor with his head—"my wife and I were busy clearing the ground, until..." He indicated the walls with his hand and, stepping back, brought up two stools: "Have a seat."

I sat; my daughter, gathering her courage, went up to one of the lanterns and gingerly made sure with her finger that it was real, then greedily, in the twinkling of an eye, having looked over the shelves, found the smallest and most graceful: a child lantern, a page lantern—and stared at it, bewitched and loving.

"Yes, yes," the man agreed. He reached for the lantern, and, carefully wiping it off with an oily rag, placed it in her outstretched hands, then repeated with conviction: "Yes." Turning to me, he explained: "She had to pick that one."

My daughter stood silently with the miracle of bright copper and clouded glass, not believing, perhaps, that this was all happening.

Somewhat embarrassed, I thanked him, then began to speak of craftsmanship. I thought that this theme should be especially close to the proprietor of this strange workshop. But I was wrong.

It made him angry.

"Craftsmanship? In old Estonia I worked in an antique store for one swindler, and he made a fuss over me. I worked in the old style, I made these ... antiques. Ornaments, furniture. Whatever you want! I even imitated sixteenth century work. You couldn't tell the difference...." He looked at his hands and, as though accusing them of something,

reproachfully shook his head, then repeated with a grin: "Craftsmanship."

He was artistic-looking in the extreme. Now, when I had by chance touched him to the quick, this showed in his face, gestures and intonation with special force. I couldn't restrain myself from asking a question that was, admittedly, somewhat tactless when you don't even know the name of the person with whom you are talking.

"Have there been artists, musicians in your family? And yourself?..."

"Yes," he answered quickly, "but I broke it. Into little pieces on the stone floor." He again looked at his hands with distaste, sternly. And he explained: "They played out of tune." He fell silent, then added, "And when I understood this, then I broke it. And my family are workers. Not artists, not poets. A railroad family. The Depot."

"You broke a violin?"

He shrank back a little, and grimaced ironically:

"Is anything left? My wife says: sometimes you hold your head and hands as if you were about to play Wieniawski or Kreisler." He laughed, settling down a bit.

Then we both looked at my daughter. She stood clutching the lantern with both hands, waiting very impatiently for us to leave.

"We're flying away tomorrow morning," she informed him.

He bowed to her respectfully, as though she were an adult, and looked at me, screwing up his eyes as though he were waiting something. I smiled, helplessly and sadly, perhaps, feeling all the anguish of the moment. Then, motioning to my daughter to go, I forced myself to say:

"Dear sir, the gift is quite precious, allow me...." and my hand showed what my tongue refused to express.

His eyebrows rose in surprise.

"You want to pay? Then why did you call it a gift? What's your daughter's name? When a lantern

leaves me," he explained softly, "I remember it, well, in the image of a person. It has his name. It is already" — and he laughed — "a little girl lantern, a little boy lantern, a grown-up lantern...."

I told him my daughter's name. He thanked me.

"You're now a little girl lantern," I reported to her when we came out to Müürivahe street, which is like the bed of a dried-up mountain river that had once rushed down a gorge. We went to the Aeroflot office, exchanged our morning tickets, and remained in Tallinn so that we could visit Master Encke tomorrow and the day after.

"Why do I make lanterns? You think: fashion? After all, many people now love these ... antiques! ("And if he'd work for money!" exclaimed his wife.) Alpinists visited me this summer. They had built a hotel on the Elbrus, probably comfortable, good, but something was missing. Something not for use, but for the heart. They couldn't figure out what it was. Then they decided: lanterns. ("And where did they learn of the existence of Encke? From Siberia, from Moscow, from the Black Sea..." — another exclamation.) We sat with them in the cellar, and I wanted to find out why precisely my lantern was missing from the mountain hotel. One of them ... ("... thirty years old, already a Doctor of Science, a physicist, travelled halfway around the world...") ...said: mountains are eternity. And so is your lantern. ("... Also eternity, understand?") Wait, at that time there was no lantern yet. Something special is needed for the mountains, I'll send it to them in three months. ("Did you see his great lantern across from the town hall, by the drugstore?") Great? Large. But my wife has reminded me just in time. The lantern by the drugstore is a character. In it... ("The whole spirit of old Tallinn.") And the drugstore. ("It's five hundred years old.") It ought to give you hope. Right? While on the Elbrus, when you have climbed far up, it

should help you better understand yourself and those with you ("... to think about eternity!"). My wife is Russian, she has taught me to speak Russian well, but, of course, she's much better...."

Under that lantern—by the old drugstore, across from the town hall—I pondered craftsmanship late into the evening, rather, the spirituality of true craftsmanship. A strong wind was whistling, and "Old Thomas" on the town hall—a pot-bellied warrior with a pike in his hand—turned tirelessly, scanning the horizons. And the lantern did not once stir; the wind broke around it, like high waves around a large, steady rock; there was not a trace of decorativeness in it. If it were to be put on stage it would most certainly have destroyed the *illusion* of action. It was itself, despite its absolute immobility, *action*. It could miraculously take one back five hundred years, to a town of burghers and monks. And then return to today, leaving in the heart the great joy of this travel in the centuries which expands life. It was itself action, because it elicited a feeling of absolute genuineness. Yes, it was just THIS ONE that hung by the drugstore several hundred years ago.

And—it also evoked this feeling—it was built today. If it could speak, we would hear: "I'm five hundred years old, but I was born a few hours ago."

Alone with this lantern, I thought late into the evening of the spirituality of craftsmanship. At exhibitions of ancient weaponry—in the Hermitage they are splendid—one does not feel this exaltation despite the fantastic craftsmanship of the armorers. Standing at the expansive, gala show cases, where, like many-figured sculpture, pistols lie delicately on yellow, dull velvet, one understands: one can neither esthetically justify nor exalt murder. The craftsmanship of armorers is without soul.

Soullessness need not necessarily be attendant on the birth of artistically valuable weapons of murder.

Moreover, it is less dangerous there, because it is obvious. In effect, the fingers are not falsifying, they are only fantasizing on the theme of non-being.

The most dangerous type of soulless craftsmanship is when the fingers dissemble. And when Encke, in old Estonia, working for a huckster, made "genuine" articles of past centuries by day and played the violin at night, he felt that one and the same hand could not lie and at the same time serve truth. Finally one splinters the violin. His passion for lanterns, which he bequeaths to youth cafés, hotels, Houses of Culture and children, is an absorption in spiritual, morally meaningful craftsmanship. (Not for nothing was it the lantern to which Andersen gave great human torment: to be able to show the magnificence of the world that is all around, and to suffer because you have not been lit.)

It may be that there is a more mundane motive for his special inclination—Encke has for several decades worked at the same Tallinn factory, Teras, in its shops, which produce "lighting apparatus"—that's what they call lamps and chandeliers that they make for cafés, universities and airports after the drawings of architects. I went to the factory after Encke's wife told me that, for the last twenty-five years, he "has probably not once had a vacation. He goes to the beach at Pirita for a couple of days and..."

"And the shop, the crypt?" I asked, amazed.

"When we cleaned the monastery granary, I had some hope. But no!... He loafs around for a couple of days...."

I began my conversation about Encke with the senior supervisor at Teras with a question about vacations, and in doing so caused the man no little uneasiness:

"Are you going to write about it? They'll think we are forcing a man to work a whole month without pay. We try to talk him into taking a rest."

"Apparently he works because it gives him satisfaction."

"Precisely, satisfaction. Forgive me, I thought that you would condemn us in the press because a man was working during his vacation. And he really has, for ... yes, for twenty years never taken a vacation of longer than two or three days. This is of course very beneficial for the factory. And we would like to compensate him. And we could find one alternative or another. But he doesn't even want to talk about it. For him, it is simply satisfaction...."

The premises of Teras are naturally not at all like the fantastic workshop in the former monastic granary. But Encke himself, standing by a large window, over a cluttered draughting table, in a sharp white light, is indistinguishable from the Encke of the secret crypt of Mûürivahe street.

"The stem," he was demonstrating to some young workers, "has to be lengthened. Just a little. I talked it over with the architect. And we have to enlarge the petals and add copper...." He traced some fantastic plant in the air, then drew a blue piece of paper out of the clutter. "I have a rough draft here. The petals have to be thinned out. More natural, right? For the café-windmill, we needed thickness, there's only half-light there, there's cozy, but this other—a university, foyer...."

Teras fills orders for café-windmills, hotels, theatres, department stores, train stations.... At the factory, they call this sort of work unique, but what makes it exceptional, unique, in my opinion, is not the absence of seriality, but Encke's artistic imagination.

It was said of one painter of the Italian Renaissance that, with the greatest inventiveness, he made it difficult for himself, trying wherever possible to concoct what no one before him dared. Searching for "complexities" in his work, this painter was inimitable, which surely distinguishes the real artist, including the worker-artist, from the artisan.

Worker-artists built the Gothic cathedrals and in them, carved pulpits from wood, pulpits majestic as the universe; they layed parquet, and the wood seemed amber (today, we can only walk on them in cloth museum slippers), and—for themselves—cut out huts that in the half-light of the north the earth to this day holds in the palm of its hand like diamonds.

The worker-artist is an image rooted in us as part of our heritage, precious from childhood.

On Sunday morning, with tickets for an evening flight, we went down Müürivahe street to say good-bye to Encke and his wife and, for the first time, came at the wrong moment.

The Sunday concert of organ music, traditional for Tallinn, was being broadcast. Encke, in a dark, somewhat old-fashioned, Sunday suit, was sitting by a window—aloof and distant. Outside the window, the fifteenth-century town wall, with a grave, grey-black texture reminiscent of a thousand-year salient of a mountain, darkened the August morning. The house where Encke lived had also been built some four hundred years ago, before the birth of the Bach chorale being played on the radio. When the organist toned down the music, anguished, on the lower bass notes, one could hear something cooking behind the curtain. Our hostess, quickly putting us alongside herself on the sofa, persuaded us to stay for dinner, while Encke sat next to the table, silent, closed in on himself, sat as if in a solemn concert hall, his head back the better to see, his hands sedately on the armrests. At that moment, listening to the organ, I felt especially clearly that before me sat a true working man. There was in his visage now no elegance and artistry, which had seemed inalienable from him. From the sleeves of the Sunday suit glanced out awkward, large hands with deformed fingers; on the immobile, solemnly concentrated face there was

something ancient, stolid, sluggish — artisanly! It was hard to believe that the evening before he had spoken to me in the crypt of a long begun but still unfinished lantern:

"I don't like it...."

"Have you fallen out of love with it?"

"Yes! I have every right to fall out of love, my heart is alive. ("Caprice," his wife remarked clearly. "It's good. It should be finished.") I don't like it," he repeated like a child.

This sluggish and stolid artisan would not be able to fall out of love, could leave nothing incomplete, could not allow himself a childish caprice at work. And I felt that the secret of the personality and the secret of the man sitting before me lay in the disparity between these two images. He remained himself both then and now. Perhaps the lightness, the play of his face and hands, were meaningful only because, behind the elegance and artistry there was a sluggish, stolid force.

The music ended. Encke looked out the window, and smiled:

"Autumn!" ("His time — autumn and winter. He goes to the crypt at night and conjures.") Then he laughed — "Winter is good. Above, wind and snow...." ("Yes, he's cozy there. We often have guests, and in the New Year nights....")

"Guests give you no peace even in winter?"

"They walk about as if in a museum," Encke answered good-naturedly. ("The only difference being that they don't take anything away from a museum.") "Well, something was taken once, the rest of the time I gave it myself. And now there's almost nothing to give — whatever I begin is promised to someone. And that winter... ("that winter he betrayed lanterns — fifty feeding troughs for squirrels, little homes on fine metal chains....") That's what happens when you entrust a wife with a secret! ("In the spring we went to Kadriorg Park at dawn and hung them, secretly, on the trees, and in the evening paper they asked: who knows who this



patron of squirrels is? He kept quiet and laughed.") I love to dupe people."

Our hosts gave my daughter and me books. Apparently, no one could leave this house without some present.

Outside the gates, already on the street, we stopped and, quietly, secretly—as if not on dry, severe stones, but on cracking, singing floorboards—we went back: through the dark forecourt to the miracle that had been revealed from the windows of the monastery. The August sun, clouded over, lit softly the wall of the windowless, yellow sandstone house next door, the wall woven up to the cornice with live greenery turning yellow. The wall, glowing, lit everything else—from the lanterns over our heads to the stones under our feet. The glass of the lanterns sparkled like amber, in great variety. We came at a good time: the light exposed the very heart of this unusual courtyard, in which it seemed that even the ancient stone smiled, made kind by the hand of man, and the monastery windows buried in the thick of the wall before us thawed unwillingly, gloomily.

If the Dominican monks, I thought, had been shown half a thousand years ago this micro-fragment of the humanized world, they undoubtedly would not have become better or chaster. But a girl or boy, after history lessons (if they arrange them in the museum), running to the windows, will undoubtedly perceive in the first minute, before the real feeling of today's world returns, Encke's courtyard as a vision of the future and, with a child's directness, will feel how man and the world change.

My daughter was first to turn, she shouted happily, I looked and saw—a genuine, living Hans Christian Andersen! (Picturesquely dishevelled hair, a high, prominent forehead, a large sad mouth made Encke extraordinarily similar to the well-known portrait of Andersen, a portrait remembered from childhood, where Andersen's

spotted tie is around his neck with artistic carelessness.)

And I was again amazed at how different this man could appear, depending on his spiritual state, the setting, the light—and every time remaining himself.

Understanding, he smiled. I began, waving my hand over the courtyard, to say that it must require no little sweat to....

"Oh!" he waved, not quite hearing. "I don't do this alone. She helps." Then he added with that childlike unexpectedness, that stunning frankness, with which he had once told a stranger about the broken violin.

"I left my first wife because she loved money."

Then my daughter and I, for the last time, walked along Mûürivahe Street, and the façades of the five-hundred-year-old houses told me Encke's genealogy.

In Moscow, on the eve of the New Year, I saw in thought how, around midnight, on the ancient, grave stones, holding a thick rope, guests were descending into the crypt-shop. Their faces and hands, when they crossed the threshold, were lit by a lantern that had a feature even Andersen had not guessed: it could discover in people unselfishness and good.

## Second Constellation

# Beauty and Good

### Chekrygin

Blok once called the name Pushkin happy. A marvellous, precise combination—a happy name: Pushkin. It really does seem happy from childhood years—it brings to mind: sleigh riding, swimming in the sea, Christmas trees, playing with a dog. Without Pushkin there is neither Christmas tree nor sea, dog nor childhood. And the portrait of the boy, curly-headed, thick-lipped, radiating good humor, is in rare accord with the joy playing in the name.

Even later, when you have learned of his heart and fate and you cannot discover even a shadow of radiant good-humorousness in the portraits of the thirty-year-old who is dreaming of peace and human freedom, when you cannot think about him or read him without pain—the name Pushkin rings with joy. Because he and childhood are inseparable? Because the first impression is longest lasting? Maybe it is a matter of his special greatness—ordinary, quiet, domestic—the greatness of a heart that does not wish to be seen and evokes in us a feeling of joy: in a letter's whimsical line or in verses sad yet not solemn. Joy is no longer sleighs or dogs, not sea or golden cockerel, but—"I want to live so as to think and suffer." Joy not childish or thoughtless, not associated with a Christmas tree, but that great joy when man worships life despite everything.

"Pushkin's name is joyful." And Lermontov?

Gloomy, sad, mysterious? The latter: a mysterious name, Lermontov. Perhaps because it seizes us, not in childhood, but in adolescence, with our first

sleepless nights and first self-doubts. Later, too, we feel in it something restless, something that tugs at the heart.

It is a strange thing: while in Pushkin's early portraits there is a true child, a pure-hearted boy, and later, with the years, there is less and less of the child in his pictures, in Lermontov's childhood portraits there is something unnaturally adult, some great, gloomy seriousness. But the older Lermontov becomes, the more something childlike comes through, as if wanting insistently to break to the surface, from within the immobility and reserve of the face. I have long dreamed of finding a portrait in which the child would show himself fully, I hoped to see the snub-nosed, round-shouldered boy in gold epaulets, the frank tenderness and delicacy of his lips, a childish seriousness of mien that isn't gloomy, to see the Lermontov whom I loved not in adolescence, but love today. I wanted to see the Lermontov who at a ball, "surrounded by the discordant crowd", feeling the touch of cold hands, amidst the bustle and trumpery, suddenly saw himself as a child and felt the supreme joy of liberation.

"I see myself as a child...." He wrote this on January 1, 1840, when those around him saw an arrogant officer, or a heartless beast, or an imitator of Pushkin and Byron, or a superfluous man, exhausted by life and early grown old. While he himself, at a Petersburg ball, "amidst the noise of the music and dance, amidst the wild whisper of rehearsed conversation," saw himself as a child.

I dreamed of seeing the Lermontov who saw himself as a child.

But no portrait, well or little known, showed him to me. I lost hope of finding my Lermontov when I saw him from afar at an exhibition of the work of Vasily Nikolayevich Chekrygin.

I saw him just after entering the hall, and I recognized immediately what I had not found before: the frank, fearless nature of a child.

Coming closer, I noticed with surprise that there was no watercolor-soft delicate moustache on the face. The liberties the artist had taken astounded me. But I did not doubt for a minute that before me was Lermontov himself, a great, serious, sad child, Lermontov, marvellously understood as I understood him, an unprotected Lermontov, at the moment when his "soul's alarm steals away, when the wrinkles vanish from his brow". Later, he again erects defenses, becomes reserved, somewhat haughty, so that no one learn his "secret tale". But I see now, at last, *my* Lermontov. A drawing in black and white: pen and ink. When was it done? I went up to look: "Self-portrait, 1918". Yes, this was the self-portrait of Chekrygin, the artist himself, until then unknown to me, to whose exhibition I dropped in (precisely, dropped in!) solely out of curiosity: I was in the Museum of Fine Arts to see the Michelangelo and, leaving, saw over the "Verstovsky House" on grey canvas an unknown name—VASILY NIKOLAYEVICH CHEKRYGIN. So I walked in....

I tore myself away from the self-portrait and began to look at the drawings. It seemed to me that a whirlwind had me, that I was flying alongside men, women, children, older persons. We were flying, glowing, touching the constellations with our bare bodies, we ourselves were a living constellation; we were flying, losing ourselves in the mists of the universe. The feeling of flight did not leave me. But it did not displace that first feeling—recognition of Lermontov. I experienced the flight—its frenzy—as Lermontov would have. Later, gradually coming to myself, I understood the world that Chekrygin had revealed to me as Lermontov would have.

This world persuaded one that the Earth is a marvellous, mysterious heavenly body, created for miracles.

Chekrygin drew with coal, chalk, graphite, sanguine, obtaining the radiance of human figures laid

bare, of the land, of the heavens. It was as though he depicted the world with feverish haste, at a moment of shock, of transition to some higher state. He hurried—sketch after sketch!—so as not to omit a single detail of the miracle sundering the heavens, opening wide what lay beyond. Mistily radiant constellations of people were depicted in his innumerable compositions, at different stages in the miracle being worked. The artist shows us something absolutely fantastic, the resurrection of the unnumbered generations who have gone into the ground, and their transmigration to worlds lost in the universe; the first moments of the return to life and immortality, of the cosmic flight, of people again seeing trees, sky, feeling warmth and cold.

Before us—radiant, living human bodies. People—not shadows!—like tongues of fire, flicker, straighten out, drift over the Earth, fade out so as again to light up.

One had to go through the small rooms several times, to calm down, to think, in order to understand: in effect, Chekrygin tells of the fantastic rule of man over the natural forces of the universe, of the unexampled triumph of human reason, of the management (precisely management!) of what was before immeasurable, incomparably more mighty than man. Until that moment, no one had told me of the realization of the age-old human aspiration—to be immortal!—with such graphic authenticity despite the mysteriousness of the action. And there has been no thinker, poet or artist who has not meditated on this with pen or brush in hand.

I again thought of Lermontov, of one feature of his adolescent verse that had once astonished me. For Lermontov, it is little to be immortal in spirit, immortal in act, he wants *immortality of the body*. Seeing himself dead in dream, he wants passionately to revive the decaying body, he is willing even to sacrifice "beatitude" so that for one minute, just one minute, he might again feel warmth with his body. He wants no other immortality.

This frame of mind, quite rare among poets (the more so among romantics), is born of his love for the Earth. He writes: "How can we not love Earth more than Heaven? Heavenly joy is opaque to us...." He even decides on what none of the real poets before or since have decided—to renounce eternity (his demon more than partook of its discomfort!). At times he dreams of immortality in the form of a "blue wave", but even this desire is joined with a powerful feeling of the corporeal world. "Oh how passionately I would kiss my golden sand." Lermontov does not wish for immortality without this "golden sand" joyously touched by skin! And describing the burial of his cadet friend, he explains with a clarity that leaves no room for doubt: "And all eyes looked at the earth as though they wanted to wrest away all that had been given to it!"

Chekrygin, in fact, shows, moment by moment, the hours when mankind at last succeeds in wresting "what had been given to it".

I had not seen the work of this artist before, had never read anything about him. And on top of this, Lermontov's face! That's probably why my first perception of Chekrygin was purely Lermontovesque, but the deeper I went into Chekrygin's world, the more I felt its completely independent force.

Chekrygin executed his "Resurrection" cycle in the first years after the October Revolution. This cycle pulses with the frame of mind of a revolutionary era that freed man from social slavery, an era that also gave birth to great dreams of the triumph of human intelligence over the elemental forces of the universe. In the artist's work there is the same enthusiastic affirmation of the might of the human masses inspired by a great idea as in the revolutionary verse of Mayakovsky. They were, in fact, as I learned later, old (despite their youth) and good friends: Mayakovsky and Chekrygin. Revolutionary temperament and a common artistic perception of the world united them.

They were in the same class at the Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture. According to the recollections of their classmates, Chekrygin was one of the few whom Mayakovsky permitted to joke about and even be impertinent. Mayakovsky (he was four years older than Chekrygin) treated the young artist with love, protectively, defending him when the cocky Chekrygin stirred up those around with the boyish acerbity of his judgments on art. Chekrygin, loving Mayakovsky ardently, once helped the latter in the publication of a lithographed manuscript book: he recopied it, did the illustrations, and it was published in an edition of three hundred copies in a small printing shop by the Nikolsky Gate.

The boy whom Mayakovsky allowed to be impudent and then entrusted with recopying and illustrating verse, was, as one of his classmates recollects, "the possessor of unseen treasures, the authenticity of which was clearly not felt by those around him". Apparently, Mayakovsky was one of the few who distinctly felt, who understood well, the treasures locked within the boy Chekrygin.

As a seventeen-year-old youth, Chekrygin, to see the world and the work of the old masters, went with a friend to Warsaw, Munich, Vienna and Paris.

He wandered about, like a young painter and scholar of the Renaissance, stood for hours before the canvases of Giotto, Tintoretto, Leonardo, went with proudly raised, bared head about Paris, then went to the shores of the Atlantic, clambered up almost sheer cliffs, stood for a few minutes on Spanish soil, which gave the world El Greco and Velasquez. The First World War began, and Chekrygin and his friend returned to Russia through London. In the British Museum he saw the canvases of Cimabue and the stones of the Parthenon.

In Russia, Chekrygin put on a soldier's greatcoat, fought in battles, then, after the Revolution, worked on the preservation of artistic monuments



in Moscow, and went back to the army—this time the revolutionary army.

The treasures locked within Chekrygin, perceived only by a few, became manifest in the first years after the Revolution.

Chekrygin was born on the eve of the twentieth century (his short life lasted from 1897 through 1922). He was an artist and thinker, a person with an intense "feeling for the age", he bore the age within himself, was sated with its pain, lived in expectation of great catastrophes and great births, thirsted for a new world.

Artists of transitional ages are people with a tragic perception of the world. The heart splits often, like the age, and it is not easy to choose the most valuable of the two halves. Chekrygin came into the world when it was the whole age that was changing, and his perception of reality was tragic in the extreme, but his heart was not divided. For him, as for Mayakovsky, it was not necessary to choose, he felt himself a man of the new age from the very beginning, he lived not in the tragedy of the collapse of the old world, but in the greater and more severe tragedy of the birth of a new reality. His drawings, sketches, and compositions breathed the tragic beauty of being—a fire eternally dying out and eternally renewed. Gleams of this fire were what he wanted to catch in the supreme hour of the history of the world.

And it is understandable why he loved Tintoretto, stood for hours in front of his canvases in the Louvre, and later often drew variations on Tintoretto's themes. They say that the day before his tragic end, he conceived drawings that freely developed Tintoretto's "The Origin of the Milky Way".

The canvases of an artist, whether he wishes it so or not, express the attitudes prevailing in his time. If the attitudes have already taken hold, his canvases gladden with harmony, proportionality, steadiness (the high art of antiquity, the art of

Raphael, of Titian), but when the artist works at a time when a new attitude is being born, his canvases are full of uneasiness, the world loses proportionality and steadiness of its parts and even distinctness of its forms, it is as though it were seen not from solid ground, but from the deck of a ship. But in losing, it gains—from a feeling of infinity.

And it is precisely this violation of proportion, this unease, this dizzying whirlwind, this infinity, which were felt in the pictures of Tintoretto, who was the last artist of the Italian Renaissance and the first great artist of the new age—the age of the renewal of the face of the earth through the scientific and technological revolution, the age of the continually accelerating rhythm of life, of huge cities, giant human masses. But Tintoretto was centuries removed from this, he felt acutely only the beginning of the great changes: in his time the age of the Inquisition and burnings was dying, but even the prescient “sorcerers”, who were condemned to death for intercourse with the Devil, could not imagine Hiroshima.

One of the last to be burned at the stake, after Tintoretto had died, was Giordano Bruno, Tintoretto's contemporary and fellow-countryman. Tintoretto felt artistically what the philosopher and heretic pondered: the infinity of the universe, the insignificance and greatness of man. One of Tintoretto's favorite subjects was a staircase with human figures, restlessly straining upwards. An image of ascending being?... Giordano Bruno often thought that people striving toward the Sun were like gods. In Tintoretto's heroes there is felt a feverish excitement, they live in lofty expectation of something. Infinity, mysterious and full of surprises, stretches out from the ship. But it is also *above* the ship and it is there, perhaps, that it is especially great and desirable. Chekrygin was the first artist to feel the real onset of the space age, which is why Tintoretto excited him. In Tintoretto's age, the thought of people equal to gods and

rising toward the Sun seemed blasphemous, while for Chekrygin it was already a realizable reality—he was a contemporary of Tsiolkovsky.

The Revolution played the decisive role in the birth of Chekrygin's "cosmic consciousness". He believed that, after the social emancipation of man would come emancipation from "earthly bonds". In 1920, he worked on sketches for the "Revolution" and "Uprising" compositions—their images are related to the later "Resurrection": the people participating in the great deeds experience the fullness of human community and draw physical and moral strength from it.

(In effect, Chekrygin's "Resurrection" is also an *uprising*, an uprising by man, who subdues the elemental forces of the universe.)

He drew the heads of slaves, soldiers, Stepan Razin\*, a cycle of sketches for the series "Firing Squad" and again and again returned to the theme of uprising, introducing children into the drawings. One of the sketches for "Uprising"—in its artistic value, an independent drawing—is the head of an urchin with wind-blown hair, face inspired and tender, a child of the barricades, a young, miraculous, fearless being, afraid neither of bullets nor of horses' hooves. Didn't this child live in Chekrygin himself until the last hour? When you look at his "Resurrection", it seems that it was drawn by a *child rebel*. Chekrygin worked on this cycle—and this is the one that stunned me with its humanity and richness of fantasy on my first visit to the exhibition—in a state of halted spiritual animation. The idea of the humanization, enspiriting of the universe entirely took over his mind and heart. He was carried away by it both as a revolutionary, a man of uprising (isn't resurrection the most fantastic, the most daring and powerful uprising?!), and as an artist, a man of art (isn't the creation of

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\* Stepan (Stenka) Razin—the leader of a peasant uprising in Russia in the seventeenth century.—Ed.

something living greater than the creation of likenesses, no matter how brilliant?).

Chekrygin began work on the "Resurrection" cycle after becoming acquainted with the writings of Nikolai Fyodorovich Fyodorov, whose ideas and personality played an exceptional role in the spiritual development of the young artist.

Fyodorov was one of the most interesting Russians of the second half of the nineteenth century. At a time when even fantasts did not concern themselves with interplanetary or interstellar travel, he, an unknown librarian in the Rumyantsev Museum in Moscow, meditated on it loftily and soberly, from time to time published in little-known journals, but most often left his reflections in manuscripts. He believed in the might of science, grieved that it had fallen into the service of capitalism: he rejoiced like a child when he learned that cannon shots can artificially induce rain and thus remove the threat of hunger from drought-stricken lands; he could find no peace from the thought that cannon in the hands of "capitalists thirsting for gold" remained a weapon of murder and were not made "weapons of meteorological regulation".

Wisdom and naïveté were joined in Fyodorov. He believed in the onset of the space age, he nurtured a plan for the resurrection of past generations and the settlement by them of heavenly bodies. And he did not understand at the same time that a "cosmic uprising" was completely unrealistic without and until a social uprising that would take the cannon from the tsarist generals and the factory owners.

The modest librarian of the Rumyantsev Museum was convinced that it was Russia that would open the space age. He wrote passionately that an intelligence merciless to man still ruled the world and the universe; three hundred years before this, the Inquisition would without hesitation have sent Fyodorov to the stake for this. He

insisted, heretically, that man should turn from contemplator to doer, should not glorify but build the heavens, the universe.

Despite Fyodorov's purely naturalistic conception of resurrection (physically, corporeally, from the earth), the philosopher's images had great metaphorical and artistic force, their very naïveté joyfully aroused the living, childlike imagination of Chekrygin.

Fyodorov's ideas and images had great charm. They impact not only on artistic natures, which are endowed with rich imagination. Konstantin Tsiolkovsky, too, was also strongly influenced by the ideas of the librarian of the Rumyantsev Museum. Later, he wrote more than once of Fyodorov with love and tenderness. The "crazy", seemingly completely unrealizable ideas of Fyodorov, who dreamed of human flight into space, inspired Tsiolkovsky in his search. The fantastic was embodied in distinct draughts, in palpable models, in succinct formulae, so that later, when Russia really had opened the space age, it could become earthly and ordinary in the charm of Gagarin.

Fyodorov's fantastic images were embodied in the drawings of Chekrygin, without a doubt the first artist of the space age. The community of people, their unity and kinship, without which it was impossible to realize the grandiose plan for enspiriting space, were for Chekrygin born in the social revolution. So the "Uprising" cycle passes quite naturally into the "Resurrection" cycle. It is not only resurrection that is an uprising, after all, but also uprising that is resurrection, a resurrection of the hitherto oppressed spiritual and moral forces of man. Chekrygin understood this perfectly. His Stenka Razin has no less relationship to the resurrection of the generations than do the brilliant scholars and artists of the future. Razin lived, fought, and died at the Place of Execution, for the *fullness of kinship* without which that selfless work, the return of the departed generations to living

world is unthinkable. Even the politically naïve Fyodorov said that only unthinking people supposed that given the existence of unhappy man there could be immortality. Does man really want immortality in an unhappy world?!

Chekrygin's drawings transport us to the future, when man, having mastered the social and economic forces, decides to become master of space. Chekrygin's works, despite their expressionism, their "quicken beating of the pulse", are deeply philosophical. They stimulate thoughts of the highest purposes of human existence. And along with these thoughts, there is an intoxicating perception: we feel the moral infinity of man suffuse the physical infinity of space. Out of charcoal and paper, Chekrygin's hands fashioned something miraculous: a velvet darkness enlivened with a just perceptible radiance. The intelligence of man, the strength of his spirit, until now localized on Earth, are spreading through space, and man is becoming true *space*, in the wise understanding of the first philosophers of antiquity: harmony, a higher order. An existence that seizes the imagination, that is fantastically full, and in which nothing is lost!

It is not the cold, insane worlds of Blok, and not those "without sail and rudder" of which Lermontov wrote, but heavenly bodies ruled by reason, domestic and mundane, whose structure, whose harmony will be the result of the incarnation of infinite thought in infinite deed.

Worlds, generations.... And isn't man forgotten in this mighty flood? In one of Chekrygin's sketches, we see, in the mysterious glow of dawn, people hastening toward an immobile, prostrate figure on the ground. Their gestures and bodies express shock, woe, hope. And we understand: there is someone on the ground who was not resurrected, and if this individual does not return to life, even the harmony of the worlds will not comfort the rest.

From his childhood years, Chekrygin dreamed of frescoes. They answered to his understanding of painting as pictures of the "existential, common tragedy" of mankind. Frescoes are, after all, tales, even novels on walls. A fresco is a wall that has become a piece of life. Chekrygin believed in the active force of art. (Isn't the Sistine Chapel a world, and didn't Michelangelo seem a god to himself when he created it?) Chekrygin believed in the generative power of the artist. I think that is why he was attracted by the ideas of Fyodorov: to bring space to life was for the librarian of the Rumyantsev Museum a matter of the synthesis of science and art. Fyodorov many times said that science and art have the same material. This formula is today easier to decipher imaginatively than logically. One can guess that it fed Chekrygin's imagination quite generously. And it confirmed his belief in the active force of art. Fyodorov sharply criticized Schopenhauer, Wagner and Nietzsche for being fascinated with depicting the end of the human race and for not trying to remove the threat of destruction. Unarguably, Chekrygin dreamed of a re-creating, a resurrecting art. Within the limits of our imagination, we can imagine the forms and heart of this art, its participation in mastering the forces of the universe.

Not now giving free reign to imagination, I would like to return to frescoes, though there, too, one cannot manage without the play of imagination. In effect, this is the same half-childish, "innocent" play that is felt in Lermontov's verse, "My House". The poet wrote: "My house is everywhere.... Its roof reaches to the very stars, from one wall to the other runs a road that can be measured by the soul, but not by the eye." In Chekrygin's imagination the walls of this "house" were quite possibly decorated with frescoes.

Of course, these walls and these frescoes have nothing in common with the walls of real houses or churches and the classical frescoes of the artists of

Pompeii or the Italian Renaissance. It would seem that Chekrygin imagined something that was at one and the same time both fantastic and real. The historian of art, Alexandre Benois, writes in one of his works that the landscapes in the pictures of Leonardo da Vinci remind us of "the magic countries that are born by looking through prisms. Who does not know the alluring force that is felt when viewing these masses, frozen in some wonderful architecture, which seem alive and contain some limitless depths?" It is possible that Leonardo did in fact see in crystals landscapes like dreams, then transported them to portraits. What seems to us fantastic and "unearthly" is really a part of the structure of the universe. And Chekrygin could see and sense *cosmic frescoes* no less clearly than Pythagoras delighted in the music of space. On the fine-grained surface of the primordial matter swirling in the abyss are images born that seem miraculous mirages when seen from interstellar ships! Behind these images are magic countries, dream landscapes hidden in crystal galaxies. To approach this without an ironic smile, one must take into account that the humanization of the cosmos will create a completely new state of the universe. Different eras—from the Magdalenian, with its drawings of bison on cave walls, to the space age, with its art that is today unimaginable—join in a powerful synthesis the best that man the artist has acquired. This absolute beauty will create, too, a different structure of human consciousness—what today seems fantastic will be living reality, like the magic countries that Leonardo discerned in the play of crystals.

Pondering the cosmic future of man did not hinder Chekrygin's everyday, mundane work in a children's theater, then in the poster division of the People's Commissariat for Education. And reflections on the art of the space age apparently did not distract him from mundane cares.



Chekrygin, with special animation, headed the work on the decoration of Moscow for the anniversary of the October Revolution. In October 1920, he lovingly and imaginatively decorated Triumphal Square—where now stands the monument to his great comrade from the School of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture—Mayakovsky.

He gave lectures on the art of the image, of which artists said that they were worthy of a philosopher. He helped arrange the exhibition "Art and Life".

He married, he had a daughter. He celebrated his twenty-fifth birthday. He had more than one thousand and five hundred drawings. His friends later said that he told them of mighty projects.

In the drawings of the "Resurrection" cycle, Chekrygin never portrayed himself. He was so young and full of life that he unconsciously rejected death, the unavoidable and sad condition for resurrection.

He fell under a train.

When he was buried, his comrades wrote on the ribbon around the wreath: "To a great artist".

Writing this, I see in my thoughts his self-portrait, the very one that once seemed to me, at the exhibition, a portrait of Lermontov.

If resurrection were only a real possibility?! Why should this remain a fantastic, unrealizable miracle?!

But in my heart, the lines written by the seventeen-year-old Lermontov live on:

If in submission to ignorance  
The creator had condemned us to live,  
He wouldn't have planted in our soul  
Unrealizable ambitions.  
He wouldn't have allowed us to strive  
For what cannot be realized.

## Tsaplin

If you walk along 25th of October Street in Moscow and, just before you get to Red Square, turn into a large court, you can see, in one of the numberless twists of its labyrinth, obedient to the chaos of former merchants' warehouses, the word "Tsaplin" written in coal on a wall, and a half-obliterated arrow pointing you in the right direction. Someone coming across this arrow by accident might think that he is looking at the name of a merchant, a name that has persisted in spite of the stormy decades, the name of a merchant who at one time stored leather or tar or wheel grease in the local cellars.

Some years ago I entered the court for the first time, saw the absurd two-foot letters in coal and the arrow, went down into the cellar on steep steps and, crossing the threshold, stopped—stunned. It's hard to find the precise image that would disclose what it was that so surprized me. It was, I would say, like part of a half-destroyed cathedral: the twilight and the marvellous figures of women, men and children made of dark wood, raised over the chaos of stone, in which one could make out mythical monsters, fish and birds of unusual shape.

"This is my life," said Tsaplin indicating the cellar with his hand and smiling.

On that already distant day, Tsaplin looked excellent. His love for life, intoxication with work, physical strength, and temperament could be felt so clearly that I—I remember—did not once feel that it was an old man standing in front of me. One

felt in him the elegance of youth, the freedom and ease that make each gesture and turn of the head natural and beautiful. In the confining cellar, stuffed with many-imagined wood and stone, he walked with the joyful dignity of a master.

I don't remember much of this first rapid and fleeting conversation.

"I can work in any material, but I have a weakness for wood, it's more spiritual than stone, maybe because it's closer to man: the universe first created stone, it made wood later, the universe was nearing us...."

"There are no oddities in the dead; everything that lives is odd because at the basis of life is freedom. You don't believe me? Go to the zoo.... When you carve or sculpt animals, you understand, you feel what can't be expressed in words or written down...."

"Modern man is more spiritual and complex than many of us see him. His contact with the universe is broader. Doesn't this really enrich him? The time is close when we will understand what life is."

He said this in front of two recently completed figures of wood: "To Space" and "From Space".

"Do they seem tragic to you? And why not! It's not only a matter of the equipment functioning normally in the heavens. The man who goes into the cold of space is tragically beautiful. Like Hamlet, if you wish. After all, it's the same thing: to be or not to be ... our immortality!"

"No, I never saw such a fish. This is a play of imagination. I wanted to show in a small stone the beginning of beginnings, one of life's possibilities, its generosity...."

"I don't take days off. Now or earlier. I owe a great debt to my people. It would be better for us to talk in the evenings, we can sit around then."

When, an hour later, I went out into the labyrinthine court and my friend told me that Tsaplin had recently turned 79 (seventy-nine!), I

took it with a thoughtlessness now incomprehensible to me, as though it were an unimportant detail.

I began to visit Tsaplin in the evenings: I delved into his archive, listened to his conversation with visitors; and when there were no outsiders in his studio and he lay down to rest on a sofa behind a curtain, I examined, again and again, without haste, his work, every time discovering something new: a fish, bird, wildcat, a piece of wood or stone that had strange outlines and, for some reason I didn't understand, was deeply touching. It seemed to me every time that I had not yet entered this world as I should, that I did not understand everything in this fate and that I still had time before writing.

One feature of Tsaplin himself had a soothing effect: unlike many old people, he loved to talk of the present and future, not of what had already been, though memories could have tyrannized a man such as he: at the end of the 1920s and beginning of the 1930s, he had toured Europe, his work had been exhibited in the salons of London, Paris, Madrid, on the island of Majorca; the English, French and Spanish press wrote much and enthusiastically about him.

Once, reading an old issue of a Paris paper that told of the "peasant genius from the Volga", who, during the First World War, being an ordinary soldier, had seen in a graveyard in Turkey a memorial that had stunned him with its wild beauty, and had in that hour decided to learn how to sculpt and later, after the revolution, had studied and after a few years achieved such monumental success that Lunacharsky sent him with an exhibition to Europe—absent-mindedly reading this naïve but, undoubtedly, sincere tale—I listened all the more attentively to Tsaplin's talk with some young people—apparently, students from a university.

They stood in front of a large block of granite on a wooden pedestal. What was striking about this

stone was that, as if by a miracle, it seemed freed from the force of gravity. It seemed that if the pedestal were knocked out from under that piece of inert matter it would float like the most delicate leaf in the air. In the language of physics, this is called anti-gravity; in the language of art—sorcery, a word dark and light, dear as childhood. It was a matter, as I understood it (if sorcery can be understood), of the outline of one of the vertical sides of the stone, which was concave, as though gathering in the fullness of the moon.

"No, no," laughed Tsaplin happily, "this is not an unfinished work, but something complete; I call it conditionally: form. I want to show with these forms that around us—in stone, wood, and of course in living beings—is hidden in abundance a beauty that has not yet been recognized." With his voice and a weak smile he indicated the importance of the last words. "And I have freed it, brought it to light, with a chisel, but man must himself learn how to free it in the imagination, then we will understand ourselves better, too."

I will take the liberty to add that in these "forms", which were the last passion of Dmitry Filippovich (in youth his passion was fantastic birds and fish; at the dusk of his life—pieces of primordial inert matter; it was as though he went to the depths of space, tracking to its source the path leading to man)—in these "forms" he loved especially to reveal the musicality of the stone. Living, liberated outlines are not only visible, they can be heard, and this complexity of the world's smallest parts provides joy and riches.

"Perhaps," one student began to dream, "on planets where civilization is higher than ours, stones really do fly, maybe even houses and towns. Gravity has been conquered...."

"Yes, yes," Tsaplin hastened to add. "Forms are for me rest after great work, a joy for the heart, a hobby. Let's go on...."

To go on meant to turn one's head.

And we are looking now, too, at a great work. I am not an art critic, so I will speak, with the emotionalism inevitable for a dilettante, only of my own perception and experience (Tsaplin's work deserves, unarguably, serious and intelligent critical analysis, which the author cannot provide and which would not seem to be necessary in this purely ethical narrative).

Dmitry Filippovich was born as a personality and as an artist by the Revolution. It is impossible to understand him in isolation from the Revolution, from its powerful frame of mind, from the heat of its acts. A Volga peasant, then a soldier, he bore within himself Russia, which in 1917 renounced the old world and began building a new life. In the beginning of the 1920s, in Saratov—there he attended classes in one of the many art schools opened after the revolution—Tsaplin carved life-size figures from wood, figures symbolizing the new Russia, which was in the torments of birth.

The first peculiarity of these figures—men, women, children—is their lack of individual features, like the gods sculpted of ancient marble. And their spirituality.

It is a miracle of spirituality expressed tangibly, physically, in wood. This is not the spirituality of an individual man or woman, of special character, but the spirituality of the revolution itself, a spirituality that rose like living sap in a living tree (this is especially perceptible in the texture of the wood), a spirituality that does not need individuality.

Serious, attentive faces, sweeping grandiose gestures: the person is thinking, he has withdrawn into himself for a moment so that he can then return to life and make it human. These are the heroes of Blok's "The Twelve" after the blizzard has quieted and the novelty of the world has struck the heart.

Almost forty years separate these figures from two recent ones—"To Space" and "From Space", which develop Tsaplin's beloved theme of the triumph of man over fate—and there is in them

the same spirituality of the revolution, only more mature and more aware of itself, nothing other than our human essence freed from alien elemental forces that distort it.

Standing before the works of Tsaplin, one thinks that revolution not only preserves the "eternal" in man: the sensation of the value and variety of life, the love of man and woman, the yearning for the unknown, the passionate search for truth, but it also gives this "eternal" a miraculous development, imparts to exalted forms. (The books that I noticed on my first visit—Plato's *Dialogues* and John Reed's *Ten Days that Shook the World*—did not, of course, lie by chance on Tsaplin's table.)

The sensation of the value and variety of life in Tsaplin's work has developed to a point where it penetrates into the very essence of being. I would like to tell in detail of the cats, birds and fish that he has carved from the stones of Majorca, but I fear that description is powerless here—one has to see them. And having seen them, one becomes a better person, feeling the magnificence and fragility of the miracle of life.

In Tsaplin's archive, I came across information in an old Spanish newspaper that the municipality of Majorca (I believe this was in 1930) examined the question of purchasing for the local museum a number of works by the Russian sculptor Tsaplin, "especially his incomparably fantastic animals", and set aside the necessary funds for the purchase.

"Are many of your works in the Majorca museum?" I asked, laying aside the paper.

"Not one," he answered sharply. And he became angry: "This is not my work! Look here," and he spread his helplessly angry arms, "nothing is mine. It's yours! Would it have been good if I had returned to Russia only with what I had left..."

Yes, he returned not poorer, but richer, and the spacious cellar that he received on his return in the former commercial court (in the 1930s, when little was being built in Moscow, great good fortune!),

was even then packed, with maximum use of the valuable space.

He worked in it for more than thirty years more; he worked well and gladly.

Only once did something like despair ever come over him: when from dampness destructive beetles got into the wooden figures—they ate away the texture from within. But Tsaplin understood that he had to act, not despair: he quickly became both chemist and surgeon, he devised an ingenious solution fatal to beetles, cut out the damaged pieces of dark wood with a file (as he later joked, he performed the world's first operations on the heart), and cured them.

In the spring I went to the mountains of Armenia and there, as it seems to me, I understood with especial force Tsaplin as a sculptor. I lived with Tsaplin's "forms" all around, but the work of freeing these living, miraculous outlines was done not by the hands of man—it would be too much even for a fantastic giant—but by the universe itself: wind, water, millennia. At times this labor, not satisfied with "form", revealed an image: a human face, a cathedral, a town. The stone lived, spoke, grew old. It was boundlessly varied and generous—left and right it gave out the continual joy of recognition, and this both disarms and disturbs, like love. The faces, figures and fantastic beings were unexpected and yet natural, as in Tsaplin's studio.

Titsian Tabidze, a Georgian poet, wrote: "It is not I who writes verse, they, like a story, write me, and life's course attends them on their way."

There, in the mountains of Armenia, I understood that Tsaplin, paraphrasing these lines somewhat, could say of himself: "It is not I who sculpt...." And in this is his essence as an artist: he only gave form to what wanted to be born. The forces of life, the times and man were focussed in him like sunlight in a fine lens, to set fire to his surroundings.



In the same mountains, I once had a dream: a bright, gay town, children, the sun, weightless, sail-like houses with painted windows, music on the bank of a sea or lake, laughter. A town delightful from head to toe—you feel as though you are on a ship that is going to break through the tide.

This was one of those euphoric dreams that you see at a great height with a heart fainting from the prickling of rarified air. And I would, of course, have forgotten it there and then but for one circumstance: the town was bedecked with Tsaplin's stones and wood. I saw wooden figures in low halls swimming in sunlight, behind thick, clear glass, stone sculptures at the intersections of streets, strange "forms" stood out in the green of parks. In the morning I decided that Tsaplin's hands really had freed enough beauty over a half-century's work to adorn a whole town. And this naïve discovery amazed me even more than the first visit to his studio.

People can be divided into two types: those who feel themselves the creditors of humanity and those who feel themselves humanity's permanent debtors. The creditors are unhappy: the awareness that everything—children, parents, comrades, the people—owe them something poisons their lives and destroys them. Debtors experience a different, exalted, enviable torment: a feeling of a debt outstanding against life, the present, and humanity.

This sensation, it seems, is born of a feeling of gratefulness for what has been, is and will be in the world, for what exists on earth, and gifts one with incomparable joy: co-operation, mutual experience, compassion, and participation with others in the holiday of life. "I owe a debt to the arcading lights of Broadway, to you, Baghdad skies, to the Red Army, to the cherry trees of Japan...." Mayakovsky's feeling of guilt before the cherry trees of Japan invariably shakes me, this touching,

exalted detail of the ethics of revolution, which senses the planet as a personal miracle.

Among the better half of humanity—the eternal debtors—Tsaplin, I am convinced, holds one of the most martyred places. This feeling of a debt outstanding was for him especially strong in the anniversary year of 1967. It seemed to him that he was observing the golden anniversary of the Revolution, which subsumed a small, personal anniversary—the fiftieth year of his work—with third-rate, incidental pieces. The Revolution, of which he, not fearing pathos, spoke those exalted words that could seem somewhat bookish, if the sincerity that inspired them did not persuade that he thought in those very words—the Revolution, to which he was obliged for everything, as man and artist, demanded of him a great work. And he came to his decision.

He asked at a stone-fashioning plant for blocks of granite from which to sculpt ten enormous human figures, symbolizing the greatness of the Revolution and the present-day spiritual beauty of the Motherland. Colossal energy, including physical, was needed for this work. And Dmitry Filippovich was over eighty. He began....

I would not want the reader to gather the impression that Tsaplin was unrecognized and alone. Can an artist of whom our highest authorities in the field of fine arts—Grabar (before the war) and Konenkov (after the war) wrote as of a rare talent, whose labor was worthy of respect and love, be called unrecognized?

Neither was he alone, especially in his last years, when the young gratefully gathered round him. Tsaplin's studio was almost never deserted. This even hampered his work: students, scholars, sailors—all crowded in.

Tsaplin was in the highest degree gifted with the desire—to give. And he gave to those who came to him the greatest joy, the joy of art; and, giving, he suffered from the consciousness that he could give

much more. He dreamed of giving his all, and that everything he created would go out directly to merge into the people.

The essence of communist society—the society we are building—consists in the fact that it creates the conditions under which a person's desire to give to people is realized in unheard-of plentitude, when no one and nothing can stay the hand that gives.

Yelizaveta  
Kuzmina-Karavayeva

I would like a book to be written some day about the women to whom the verse of great poets is dedicated. About the beautiful Lesbia, who lived two thousand years ago in Rome and drove Catullus out of his mind. He wrote her in one of his poems: "...One can want more strongly with a heart deceived, but one cannot love"—and revealed in so doing new continents, to this day little studied, in the human heart. About Laura of Avignon, to whom Petrarch dedicated sonnets and cantos for twenty years of her life and ten more years after she died. At sixty-five, on the anniversary of his first meeting with Laura—after forty-two years!—he took the manuscript of a sonnet written long ago and wrote it anew: "... in the year one thousand three hundred and twenty-seven, in April, in the first hour of the sixth day, I entered a labyrinth from which there is no exit."

And I would like there to be a chapter in this book on the fate of the girl to whom Alexander Blok on February 6, 1908, dedicated these marvelous lines:

When you stand before me,  
So full of life, so lovely,  
But so distressed,  
Speaking only of sorrowful things,  
Contemplating death,  
In love with no-one,  
Despising your own beauty—  
Why is it so? Do you think I want to hurt you?  
Of course not! After all, I'm not violent,  
Nor yet a deceiver, nor even a proud man,

Although I know a great deal,  
 Have had too many thoughts since I was a child,  
 And wrap myself too much in my own feelings.  
 You see, I'm a teller of tales,  
 A man who calls everything by its name,  
 Who steals the fragrance from the living flower.  
 However much you speak of sorrowful things,  
 However much you consider ends and beginnings,  
 I still dare to think  
 That you are only fifteen years of age.  
 That is why I would have you  
 Fall in love with a simple man  
 Who loves the earth and the sky  
 Much more than speeches in rhyming and blank verse  
 Addressed to the earth and the sky.  
 Then shall I be happy for your sake,  
 Since only a person in love  
 Has the right to be called a human being.

I have loved these verses from childhood, but for some reason have never considered the person behind them. For some reason I never bothered to think that there was here a real, fifteen-year-old girl with a name, with a destiny.... And I might never have thought about this if a tall, animated man hadn't once entered my office: a famous participant of the French Resistance, who had gone through Gestapo prisons and the Buchenwald concentration camp—Igor Krivoshein. He showed me books published in Paris immediately after the war, letters, and manuscripts, and I learned of a destiny that is one of the most amazing ones and yet for some reason is to this day almost unknown to us.

At the beginning of this century, in 1908, on a winter's day that was like one long dusk, a Petersburg high school student, Liza Pilenko, went off to see Alexander Blok. For a long time she stood at the windows of his house on Galernaya Street, finally made up her mind, and rang the doorbell....

Liza Pilenko was fifteen years old. She was born and grew up in the South, near the Black Sea. She loved the sun. In St. Petersburg, everything seemed reddish to her—reddish mist, reddish snow—

there was never any sun. For hours at a time she wondered restlessly through the distant, deserted outskirts during that first Petersburg autumn and winter, and felt a yearning of which she herself said, many years later, having gone through more than it would seem man could bear, that this half-childish yearning was the sharpest in her life.

Once, at a literary evening at a school on the outskirts of town, she saw and heard Blok. A man with a motionless, indifferent, beautiful face, as if cut from stone, slowly and tiredly read verse. Reddish snow, reddish mist, and urban claustrophobia were in the verse—there was the senselessness of the world and a despairing challenge to this senselessness. The verse sang in her. "Kill me, as I once killed those close to me! I have forgotten everyone I loved, I have screwed tight my heart with a blizzard...." And she felt joy, too, perhaps the most poignant in her whole life—she was in an unreal world. This man—only he could help her vanquish her longing.

The first time, Blok wasn't home. She went again, and again he was out. The third time, she decided desperately: I'll wait!

They took her to a small study with an enormous portrait of Mendeleyev, a desk that was almost completely clear—the precise orderliness of the room made her think unwillingly that it was inhabited by a scholar, not a poet.

She waited a long time, then steps, talk in the hall, Blok enters in an expansive, black blouse with turned-down collar, very quiet, very shy. He is silent, he waits; and she, gathering her spirits, tells him everything at once—the reddish mist and snow, the yearning, the senselessness of the world.

Blok listens attentively, even respectfully, as if it were not a fifteen-year-old girl before him but an adult tormented by important questions.

They talked long, it grew dark outside, and this was the first evening in St. Petersburg that she felt

good. She no longer felt a longing, because she was sorrier for Blok than for herself. And she began, carefully, to comfort him....

A week later she received a letter in an unusual, bright blue envelope. It was the verse:

When you stand before me  
So full of life, so lovely....

A great and difficult life awaited the girl from St. Petersburg. She married, was famous for a short time as the young poetess Kuzmina-Karavayeva, left her husband, ran away south, to the sea and sun, lived a severe life in a workers' settlement and there, stunned by the wave of people running from the Revolution, lost her bearings in the wave, and came to herself on the other side of the Black Sea, in emigration, in hopeless poverty and loneliness.

Prior to the Second World War, there was a lot of talk in Paris about Mother Maria. A strange nun.... She was joiner, carpenter, painter, seamstress, embroidress, icon painter, scrubwoman, cook, typist, mattress maker, milking girl, gardener. She loved physical labor, despised soft hands, hated comfort—material and spiritual—could go for days without eating and sleeping, denied weariness, loved danger. She led a severe and active life: she began by opening, with money collected in Paris, a small dormitory and dining hall for the unemployed on the Villa de Saxe and ended by hiring, at her own risk, a large house on Lourmel, 77, which became home for hundreds and thousands of impoverished, hungry and lonely people in the French capital. She went around the tuberculosis, psychiatric and other hospitals. She herself washed the floors and painted the walls at Lourmel, 77. And she felt that this was little, that she should give even more of herself, more fully, to people. She had only one weakness—verse; she wrote herself, she often read Blok. "...I have forgotten everyone I loved, I have screwed tight my heart with a blizzard." She forgot nothing, and, perhaps, slept so little because

she thought much of Russia. And fate buffeted this woman mercilessly. In the summer of 1935, her daughter, Gayana, a convinced Communist, unable to live without Russia, returned to the Motherland; Alexei Tolstoy, then in Paris at the First International Congress of Writers in Defense of Culture, helped her. In Moscow, Gayana died of dysentery after less than two years.

When nazi troops invaded Belgium and Holland, Mother Maria decided to go East on foot. "It is better to die on the way to Russia than to remain in subjugated Paris."

"I long for the Volga, Siberia, Russian people," she said.

But even as she prepared to leave, she did not forget those with her, she fed the hungry. She was often seen at Les Halles Centrales: in a ragged, dusty cassock, in worn-out men's boots, she lugged heavy bags of vegetables on her shoulders.

Events unfolded faster than expected — Mother Maria ended up in a Paris subjugated by the nazis. The house at Lourmel, 77 became one of the headquarters of the Resistance. The impoverished, hungry people trampled down by life, whom she had rendered effective compassion—they were a force dangerous for the nazis. And the tall, stately, adroit, calm woman, with the round and good face, in the black robe, a woman already grown old, once more saw the meaning of life in making good a reality, but this time a risky reality, smelling of powder and prison walls—this woman gave herself entirely to underground work.

The Lourmel committee was an important center of anti-nazi activity in Paris. It passed on parcels, money, and false documents to prisoners, organized escapes, listened on the radio and passed on Soviet news. In the house at Lourmel, 77 Communists, Russians and Jews hid. In 1942, two Soviet soldiers escaped from prison lived there. The soul of the Lourmel committee was Mother Maria.



In February 1943 the Gestapo arrested her and her son Yura. The eighteen-year-old Yura was sent to Buchenwäld, where he perished a few months later. She was sent to Rawensbrück.

. In a Paris newspaper, even before the end of the war, on May 4, 1945, there was a notice in which two French Communists from the Department of the Nord, repatriated from the Rawensbrück camp, reported that a Russian nun, Mother Maria, an unusual woman, had been in their block.

There are several versions of her death, each much like a legend. According to one story, the most widespread, on March 31, 1945, when liberation was at hand, Mother Maria went to the gas chamber instead of a Soviet girl picked by the nazis. She exchanged jackets and numbers with the girl, explaining in a few words: "I'm already old, but your whole life is ahead...."

Was it really that way? I spent the next few months after my talk with Krivoshein seeking out former inmates of Ravensbrück; I wrote letters, read the replies, talked with them. I had a naïve hope—I wanted to find the girl she had saved. But, despite all my efforts, I could find none of the eyewitnesses of Mother Maria's last hour; but I did learn a great deal about this remarkable woman.

Under conditions hellishly calculated to make a human being no longer human, she did not lose the most wonderful of human gifts—she continued to think. And when one woman bitterly complained to her that she no longer felt anything and that even thought itself was ended, Mother Maria exclaimed: "No, no, you must without fail think! Struggling with your doubts, your thoughts will be wider and deeper. Don't stop thinking...."

I do not remember anyone in Dante's hell speaking words so marvellously brave, so splendidly human: "Don't stop thinking." And she did think: about the reddish mist that had settled over Europe, about the struggle of the great meaning of human existence against cruel meaninglessness

emerging from the depths of millennia, when "our" first became "my". She loved Blok's lines, his dream of the future: "And nothing is more mine, but ours, and the tie to the world is taut."

Of Blok she thought, of course, all the time. Where people sometimes forgot their own name, she recited his verse from memory. Most often: "Wind, wind on all God's earth...." Thought of the wind must have been her last.

The more I learned of this woman, the more I wanted to stand near the house in which she had waited for Blok. I went to Leningrad and found the house. It was the same grey misty winter day, like a long drawn-out dusk, the same as almost sixty years before, when the fifteen-year-old Liza Pilenko, with her hands in her pockets, a fur hat drawn over her ears, went along Nevsky Prospect and turned into Galernaya Street.

I stood for a long time in front of Blok's house, agitatedly repeating my favorite verses, experiencing them anew: much had now entered them that I did not feel or see, indeed could not see or feel, earlier, when I found in the beautiful, singing lines only the sadness of a wise, good man, who smiles shyly so as not to disappoint a dear girl with his sadness.

When you stand before me,  
So full of life, so lovely....

Time apparently puts its special imprint not only on architectural memorials and artists' canvases, giving them some additional, fourth or fifth, dimension.

It was snowing, it was rapidly turning dark. Lights appeared in the windows. Not long before the Second World War, Yelizaveta Yurievna Pilenko wrote her memoirs of Blok; in them, she told of what she had thought as she was leaving Blok that evening, walking along Galernaya Street: "I left

part of my soul there. This was not half-childish infatuation. Rather, there was in my heart a mother's alarm and concern. And at the same time, my heart was light and joyous. It is good where there is in the world such great longing, such great life, great attention, such a great, bared, penetrating soul."

In these memoirs, she also told of many subsequent meetings with Blok, after Liza Pilenko had become a young Petersburg poet. They sat until five in the morning, stoked the fire, talked....

"Once he spoke of the tragic nature of all human relations. They are tragic because they last less time than a human life. One knows that, in trying to develop them, one is also working toward their death. And yet one hastens their development."

A great, bitter thought.... Reading the memoirs the first time, I agreed with it. But later, learning more and more about the author of the memoirs, I unwittingly compared this with what Blok had said about human relations. And I saw in her fate, in her great love for Blok, a marvellous refutation of his bitter thought. Human relations can last longer than a human life. And not just because one person dies and the other loves him as though he were alive. In exceptionally fortunate cases, human relations can by themselves become as real a value as the works of architectural geniuses, great music and wise books. The relations between Laura and Petrarch, Mrs. Patrick Campbell and George Bernard Shaw, do not fit into Blok's formula. They are more durable than a human life.

## Rembrandt

For a long time I did not notice that woman. I saw her, and didn't see her at all. She sat resting on a chair, her head bent slightly down, in the room containing Rembrandt's paintings. I did not see her as a real, live person though I came here from day to day just as if I were coming to work. It was the canvases, and not this faceless guard, that were real. I stood for hours before "Danaë", "Adieux de David à Jonathan", and portraits of old men and old women. Their faces and hands were, for me, most genuine and real. And when a tour group came between me and the paintings, I had the feeling which one sometimes has in winter, in the woods: one wants to see sunlight that had been blocked by the trees and, stepping forward, one is blinded by dagger-like rays and takes the full weight of its warmth upon oneself. Tour groups tarried, it seemed colder, more gloomy, more solemn just as though the sun, not wishing to confront me face to face, had gone behind a cloud. At times it seemed to me that I was surrounded by clouds illuminated from within.

I experienced my first love for Rembrandt; it consisted of both naïve obsession and foolish urgency. I wanted to know the secret of his paintings that day, at once, that very minute. Why did the faces and hands tell me incomparably more than those of the men and women on canvases in neighboring rooms of the museum? Why did the unattractive and no longer young Danaë touch me more deeply than the most beautiful, and youngest

figures? Why was "Portrait d'un juif âgé" particularly sad and wise this morning, as though he had suffered and thought last night when I wasn't here? The last "why" is, of course, the most important.

The people in Rembrandt's paintings never looked exactly the same. The faces and hands in the paintings always expressed some new thought, some different spiritual state. Beyond the figures were certain curious spiritual workings that never cease day or night.

Spiritual work—canvases?! In order to ascertain, as it were, whether they were dead or alive, in the most naïve and elementary understanding of life and death, once I almost touched a painting, but at that very second the faceless guard of Rembrandt's canvases appeared right beside me and gently stopped my hand. I apologized and immediately forgot all about her because I was so caught up in an unexpected discovery. It seemed that the fantastic tower there, behind the sorrowful embracing figures of David and Jonathan, reminded me of the ruins of a ruthlessly bombed town. The painting seemed touchingly contemporary. Later I went up to the old men whose faces also seemed to belong to the present day. I decided that the changeability of their expressions could perhaps be explained by the wealth of their recollections. The artist indeed gave them a life, a life which has gone on now for 300 years—from Spinoza to Hiroshima. The thought that the people in Rembrandt's canvases *lived*—that they cried over loved ones, sought the truth, smiled at their newborn, thought about the world, saw good and evil for *three centuries*—this thought explained to me why they do not often look exactly the same. It seemed that at that moment I saw the ceaseless spiritual workings which make up the essence of their being. And already, the face of the old man was no longer like it had been a second before. What was he thinking of? What was he recalling?

In love, especially in first love, after a number of happy discoveries comes a period of joyous serenity, exalted soberness. All this was in my attitude toward Rembrandt. Gradually more profound, equable, thoughtful relationships developed between us and I did not read, but reread his stories-paintings without hurrying, and with even greater enjoyment.

I felt that I was turning the pages of the *book of life*, but not because Rembrandt often pictured his contemporaries as biblical characters. His paintings, especially portraits, told of the world of man mystically, sadly, and wisely. Rembrandt's heroes—beggars and military commanders, shepherds and scholars, poets and artisans—are marked by courage and humaneness. In neighboring rooms I saw splendid canvases of courageous people but often they lacked a complete humaneness—or they were humane but not fully courageous. But here these two qualities, in organic combination, imported great beauty to young and old, women and men alike. I read this book again and again, slowly, and for a long time I did not tear myself away from its precious pages. If before I had come to the Hermitage to see Rembrandt, now I came to the room containing his works to see "Portrait d'un juif âgé", "Adieux de David à Jonathan", or "Portrait d'un vieillard en rouge"—to see one painting, one portrait. And a single canvas was no longer just a story, it was a whole novel. I plunged into the first part of the novel—childhood, the second—youth, and the third—"Love" or "Battle with Fate". I saw the Holland of the seventeenth century—her foggy pastures, swamps; I saw Amsterdam—picturesque snow-covered houses, canals dotted with dim lights.... The people were praying, baking bread, dying of the plague, decorating buildings with paintings, sacrificing themselves in the name of truth.... And from that distant time, three centuries earlier than our own, the face of a man emerged in

that fantastic, far-away world. It was a man whose fate, in the past and the future, began to seem more important than my own personal existence. More specifically, in those hours his fate became my own.

People often say somewhat naïve things about persons depicted in good paintings: "Look—how alive they are!" We say such things especially in childhood. But even later, on seeing the canvases of Holbein, Velasquez, or Titian we often cannot hold back the childish "they're alive!". Standing before Rembrandt's portraits one usually does not have this feeling, just as one naturally would not have this feeling looking at a thinking, loving, striving individual who is, of course, alive. One explanation is that there is simply no alienation, no division into "I" and "he" or "I" and "they": "I am alive, but he or they in the painting are *as though* alive".

But the basic, most essential explanation is that whoever Rembrandt depicts, he is depicting you, just as whoever Shakespeare and Tolstoy write about, they are writing about you. And, if in the world of literature this is considered a mark of genius, then in the world of painting, due to certain laws of art that we are not fully cognizant of, it strikes us as a miracle. Perhaps the heart of the matter is that the person in the painting before us is man, man in the flesh. It is easier to imagine oneself a Hamlet whose physical image is what we fancy it to be, than to identify, even for a moment, our own "I" with a man whose face, hands, dress, bearing—down to the tiniest wrinkles of his forehead and scarcely perceptible folds of his camisole—are presented in a way that graphically defeats our imagination. Rembrandt, if you will, is the sole artist to accomplish such a feat for the man he paints is more than *that one* man, at the same time he is specifically that singular individual—on a country road, on a church porch, or perhaps in an antique shop. Thus in that unique person who is at times in biblical dress, one recognizes oneself.

Why? Once again I was going up the side stairway and past the rooms of ancient art. And my heart skipped a beat when I crossed the threshold and saw the faces of the old man and old woman which were ordinary to the point of anguish. They were motionless in their grief, but all the same they had changed since I had seen them last evening.

The woman slumping on the chair recognized me by now. Sometimes she smiled at me and I smiled back, rather absent-mindedly. She lowered her head again, apparently not wishing to distract me from the painting by even briefly reminding me of her own existence. She only came over closer to me twice—to lower the curtains when the winter sun over-zealously illuminated “*Adieux de David à Jonathan*”, and to raise them again to let in the white afternoon as a snowstorm raged outdoors. In passing I noticed her hands. I was a little surprised that they were large, like a man’s hands. Once, after I had been standing before a painting quite a long time I realized that she—we were alone in the room—was about to offer me a chair. I gestured to her that she needn’t.

The secret of the artist’s great portraits tormented me. What did he see in man? What did he understand about man?

The portrait of the poet Jeremias de Dekker hung on the wall. A shadow lay on his forehead, black and stern, but grew softer as it fell to his lips. He was concentrating on something that, it seemed, would be resolved at that very moment; one would hear his thoughts and more fully understand life. He has been silent for 300 years. What did he write about *then*, before Rembrandt gave him immortality? Though his lines may have been forgotten, his face lives on. But have his works died? No, he must have written at least one great line—if only one. And perhaps it remained only within his heart, and Rembrandt saw it there. His name, Jeremias de Dekker, says nothing to me, but his face tells of the infinity of man.



Later, I stood for a long time before "Portrait d'un juif âgé". People say it is a portrait of Menasseh ben Israel, the fanatic who tried to excommunicate Spinoza from the world, from god. But I read in Rembrandt's "Portrait d'un juif âgé" the great, and in that century heretical, notion of Spinoza's: man is god to man. And I understand—this idea was given birth in sleepless nights tormented by the search for truth. Some tormenting thought lies on his sorrowful lips. He persecuted Spinoza? But didn't this cause sleepless nights later on, when fanaticism had turned to ashes and when truth, like the sun before dawn, began to glimmer?

"Portrait d'un juif âgé" brought to mind the portrait of Rembrandt's elder brother, Andrian van Ryn, in the Pushkin Museum in Moscow. Biographers of the artist tell how van Ryn did not understand Rembrandt, that he condemned Rembrandt for wastefulness, envied his successes and was offended by the knowledge that fate had been extremely generous to one, but robbed the other. Van Ryn had been a cobbler, later a miller; he earned florins that supported Rembrandt's studies as a youth.

The portrait of van Ryn is a revelation. It is an understanding which came at the same high price that the fanatic Menasseh paid for truth. Van Ryn is already old; he is resting, his hands on his knees, and his head is bowed slightly in thought. Who was it who said that a wistful face makes the heart purer? Was it Shakespeare? Van Ryn has precisely that wistful face which makes the heart purer. He understood Rembrandt. But this is not, however, the essence of the painting. The crucial factor is that Rembrandt never, not for a moment, ceased to understand van Ryn even when, as is apparent, van Ryn did not understand himself.

Rembrandt captures an individual at the highest moment of his life, the moment he begins to understand that there is something more real in life

than what before had seemed the very essence of his existence. This, of course, must not be taken literally, or naturalistically, for spiritual values, the life of the human spirit, have a peculiar reality all their own. Rembrandt makes this peculiar reality almost tangible and as vivid as the trees, the human body, the sea, river banks, and clouds of other great artists. Rembrandt did not invent people; he captured their inner reality (even when it was as yet unrealized) and knew how to bring it out for the rest of the world to see.

One may often have a strange feeling before the canvases of great painters, especially those of Van Dyck and Gainsborough. One cannot believe that the gentle, almost unearthly women and boyish, helpless men have long since died—and when one understands that one wants to bring them back to life. Yet one has no desire to bring Rembrandt's portraits back to life for it does not seem that the men and women, the old men, are dead. They seem immortal, for the reality itself which the artist presents is immortal.

As a painter Rembrandt was a spontaneous materialist and did not view the soul as a separate, objective substance. For him the soul was human life, human experience, human destiny, rather than an abstract metaphysical category. The spiritual realm was not something unreal, it was his life's blood. That is why it may seem to you that Rembrandt's paintings are actually portraits of yourself. For it is certainly true that what takes place in man's spiritual world, takes place in our own individual worlds.

Now, amidst Rembrandt's paintings I was, for the most part, meditating, rather than just looking. I would sit in front of a particular picture I had selected for the day, thinking, jotting something down. Sometimes in the morning when I arrived the chair was already standing in the exact place where I had intended to be. At first I had an explanation for it; I thought they had probably not

moved the chair away the night before. But once I remembered precisely that in the evening I had been sitting in front of the canvas of the fall of Aman, while in the morning "my" chair—a comfortable antique piece which, probably, at one time, the visitors were not allowed to use—was near "Portrait d'un juif âgé" which I had intended to study that day. I was surprized for a moment, but then, of course, immediately forgot all about it. But a few days later, I again, by chance, found my chair not where I had left it the day before. And again I was surprized, but forgot about it immediately. I remember thinking ironically about the possibility of telekinesis, once it was clear that my chair moved about the room at night after I had gone and would be waiting for me in the morning exactly where I wanted it. I had neither the desire nor time to go into all this, I was captivated by the thought that in his best portraits Rembrandt represented a *particular* man as well as the whole of humanity, one concrete spiritual life and the spiritual life of the entire world. I pursued this idea as I moved from painting to painting. And every morning I found my chair in the very place which, that day, would nourish my idea with new impressions.

Once, right after the museum opened, I walked up to "Portrait d'un juif âgé". The secret of this portrait tormented me. From a distance I noticed that the chair was not there. Coming closer, I was truly surprized—the painting was gone! In its place hung a sheet of paper covered with writing in purple ink. I stared at the paper idiotically. For some reason I had utterly forgotten that a painting is not a memorial plaque, that it can be taken for restoration work, or sent off to another exhibition. I was brought to my senses by a voice near by.

"They will bring it back in about ten days. Might even be a week. Restoration work, you know."

I turned—it was the woman who usually sat on the hard ordinary chair in the corner, the one with

the smooth, old footrest. She was the guard of the paintings.

It was a day in March with the sun, snow and clouds. The brilliance of the spring morning over the Neva flooded into the palatial windows of the Hermitage and shone more brightly than the phosphorescent tones of the canvases. The woman hurried over to the window and closed the yellow silk curtain that had absorbed the rays of the sun. Then she came back to me, and straightened the grey paper that stated where "Portrait d'un juif âgé" had been taken.

"Perhaps," she began unsurely, "you would like to sit in front of 'Jeune fille' today. They will take her away, too, in three days." She smiled understandingly. "Your chair is over there."

I saw that she was over sixty, perhaps quite a bit over sixty. And until now, she had probably had very little time just to sit idly with nothing much to do or to walk around without carrying something heavy. She was rather bent over, but one would not notice that while she was sitting, slumping down over in the corner. But now it was apparent and it seemed incongruous with the kind wrinkles of her grandmotherly face.

"Have you been putting the chair out for me?" I asked a superfluous question.

She laughed softly. "I had already noticed that you would sit before 'Aman' for three days and then move on to 'juif âgé' on the fourth." Then she added seriously, "The days are long. I see to what needs and what doesn't need to be done... And so I started watching you and watching you, and then I got bored. Forgive an old woman... And," she lowered her voice and added ironically, "when I go home—it's like you're standing there before me."

"I will probably be leaving the day after tomorrow," I said, just to give some response.

"You won't wait?" she asked sadly, glancing at the bare wall. "But perhaps you can stay a bit longer; sometimes they return the paintings after

four days. That's the way it was with 'David and Jonathan', which then was called something else—'David and Absalom'. They said they took 'em for three months, but only after two weeks...."

"Do they often change the names of the paintings?" I asked, not wanting her to walk away.

"They certainly do!" she readily affirmed. "Take that one, over where you were sitting before. Now it's not 'Aman', like it once was, but 'David and Uriah'. There are pest too many of those biblical names! They're just playing with 'em...." There was neither condemnation nor irony in her voice, as though she were talking about children. "But for me," she confided in good faith, "it's not a question of new names. The person over there is just the same whether we call him Uriah or Aman.... It doesn't bother me a bit. And Danaë over there, some people call her: Bathsheba. This," she explained, "is Uriah's wife whom David loved, who...." She shrugged her shoulders, laughing. "And she's probably so happy she doesn't remember who she is. And your old man there, he will probably get a biblical name. They'll have no rest 'til they give him a name. They've changed the names on some of them three times and the old man hasn't even received a first one. But I will go on calling him his old name...."

"The 'juif âgé'?"

"No," she said, taken aback, and reddening as though she had uttered something immodest, something one should never say a word about to a person one didn't know at all well.

"No?" I found myself repeating, surprised by her confusion. She smiled and turned her face toward me. And I totally forgot about all the immortal, phosphorescent canvases, I forgot about Rembrandt and about the Hermitage. I looked at her face and felt that for me, there was nothing more important in the world at that moment. Human fate, ordinary and yet strange was written upon her face: children, work, war, hope, funerals,

an unwavering heart, loneliness, tiredness, and a longing to work. I saw her life, understood what she had been and what she had not been. And at that moment when I thought I had utterly forgotten Rembrandt, he taught me a great lesson. I'm not afraid of stating it in a way that is perhaps rather banal: nothing in the world is more important than the person standing before you. But this seemingly inscrutable formula bothers me because it is not precise enough. There is something more essential than *importance* here. Understanding a person, which begins with one's very first impressions of him, should be a conscious act of resurrecting the very best of all that has been and *could* possibly be in his lot in life. Understanding, even when it has just begun, should already be creative. It is not enough to be aware of the importance of man, for it can be simply passive.

She lowered her head, as though bowing toward me, and slowly, slowly she walked off, stepping carefully over the fine parquet floor. Again I sensed that she was quite bent over. She sat over on the hard chair—not the museum piece—where she had a good view of the entire room. Now that I had seen her face once again I understood that men and women, old men and old women, in Rembrandt's portraits took the places of those who had left her life; the portraits took their names. Over there in the corner, she confirmed this thought by smiling one last time. Then her face again grew stern and she turned away so as not to distract me by reminding me that we had just met.

And again, till dusk, I wondered at Rembrandt's ability to present the reality of one's spiritual life physically, tangibly. And apparently he was the first, in the history of world art, to discover this reality in ordinary people: craftsmen, ploughmen, fishermen. Earlier this extraordinary reality had seemed worthy only of great persons—saints, martyrs, heroes. Rembrandt, however, saw it even in an Amsterdam beggar.

I thought quite a lot that day. Perhaps it was because I *saw* her face for the first time that morning. At night, dosing off to sleep, I saw it again. Her face was flooded in cloudy gold tones and shrouded in shadow—exactly as Rembrandt would have painted it. Before me was a portrait, her portrait, painted by Rembrandt.

In the morning, when I entered the museum room, the first thing I wanted to see was her face. She sat slumping down, as usual, and in her everyday, domestic world there was nothing mysterious, alluring, Rembrandtesque.

That day I stood for a long time before a huge, dark canvas depicting the end of the wanderings of the prodigal son of the old unhappy biblical character. I shifted my position and saw that where the brown shaded into black it seemed that a face, like a foggy reflection on the water, emerged from the impenetrable darkness, a face I had not noticed before. From that moment, putting off my departure from one day to the next, I began to examine, in the dark canvas, *faces I had never seen before*, witnessing the return and repentance of the prodigal son. The discovery had been awaiting me, but it all depended on the light—haze or sunlight, morning or evening—and on the place where I was standing. I saw new women, men, old men and at times I tried to persuade myself that there was nothing there but reflections brought to life by my imagination. I could not believe they were there, for just a moment ago this part of the canvas had been as dark as night, a starless night with heavy overcast skies. But in the fleeting reflection it became so apparent that there *was* a human face there that my doubts vanished. With my own eyes I saw man's victory over the darkness of non-existence, saw the humanization of the universe.

One morning I caught Yelizaveta Yevgrafovna standing before the painting. (I'll remember that day forever because I was in her apartment later that evening, in a little room with a narrow,

cheerless window.) The room was empty and quiet and she did not see me. Probably this solitary moment had prompted her to satisfy her curiosity. At first she stood motionless, like a statue. Then she leaned back, shook her head, and quickly shifted from one foot to the other. Obviously she wanted to understand what I had been looking for. It struck me that this was the only canvas that she had not brought "my" chair to, though I was drawn to this picture more often during the past days than to the others.

I stepped out into the open once she had returned to the corner. She had a thoughtful expression on her face. I, of course, was anxious to find out what she too saw in the fleeting reflections on the canvas. But I thought it would have been unseemly to ask her about it at once. Surely she thought no one saw her. Perhaps whatever it was she discovered was related not to the return of the prodigal son but to her own fate—just, as I had become more and more convinced, she had some secret relationship with the men and women in Rembrandt's portraits. Therefore, all I told her was that I had to leave the next day, that I couldn't put off my departure any longer, that I probably wouldn't return for a long time and that I regretted that I hadn't managed to find any reproductions of Rembrandt's best paintings.

"My goodness!" she exclaimed. "I have all of 'em! They were Boris Mikhailovich's. Why didn't you say so before? I never gave it a thought.... And I have a large old book," she lowered her voice as if telling me a secret, "that has a full list of Rembrandt's possessions. It tells of his paintings, his black leather chairs.... Tomorrow's my day off. But what I'm talking about! I don't live far from here — just on Baskov Lane...."

That evening I walked over to her apartment on old Baskov Lane. It was damp, cold March weather; a wet snow was falling. The buildings seemed immense, black, oppressive. I entered a gloomy, old



courtyard and went up the stairs to the third floor. I had not yet rung the bell when Yelizaveta Yevgrafovna opened the door, as if she were waiting impatiently for me, watching out the window, and then standing in the hall listening for my footsteps. We went into a small room. I saw a wide, old-fashioned bookcase, a reproduction of Titian's "Magdalene" on the wall, an old couch, and a table all set for supper.

"It's noisy out there," said Yelizaveta Yevgrafovna, pointing toward the kitchen. "Before, when we lived here, we only heard the wind an' rain against the window. Boris Mikhailovich wouldn't even allow any music in the house. So he and Yelena Victorovna went to the philharmonic. But here, I'll show you something nice." She went over to the bookcase, pulled out an old book, and told me to sit at the table. She opened the book at her favorite place.

"Look: a copper kettle ... a child's dresser ... two pillows ... two blankets...." She seemed as happy as a child. One had the feeling that this everyday, household Rembrandt was particularly near and dear to her. "A hot water bottle!" she exclaimed. "A hot water bottle. He must have frozen sitting before his fireplace at night. That's no oven!... Look! Blue bed curtains...." From the animated look on her face I guessed that she was not simply showing me just a listing of furniture, but Rembrandt's real, genuine possessions—touched by the same hands that created "Danaë", "Portrait d'un juif âgé", as well as the gigantic dark canvas which she had examined so curiously that morning. "Well, what am I doing?" she caught herself. "I'm reading this to you as though you didn't know how to read it yourself! Do take it, don't think a thing of it. I'm not gonna miss it. I already know it by heart.... The evenings are long and I just flip through the pages. Boris Mikhailovich left loads of things. I've already given half of 'em away."

"Was he an artist?" I asked cautiously, questioning her about her life outside the Hermitage.

"Boris Mikhailovich? Please do sit here, it's more comfortable. He taught drawing, in the Academy of Arts. But he did his own nature drawings in the summer, to keep himself happy.... Have some cheese and pâté. He and Yelena Victorovna, his wife, lived with me in my house four summers. Artists love our village—birches, meadows.... And Boris Mikhailovich, he loved it, too. Yelena Victorovna told me how he had shown great promise in his youth—but then his hands froze in Siberia, and once your hands freeze.... In the winter I would rub his hands with goose grease and he would joke, 'Well now, Liza, Rembrandt himself hasn't got anything on me.' And he went on: 'Rebral, he is my pal.' At first I didn't understand what a gem it was. And even now I still call Rembrandt 'Rebral', like Boris Mikhailovich did. Only say 'Rembrandt' in the museum. And well, they lived with me for four summers. They just begged me on trying to get me to come here and live with them forever.

"Yelena Victorovna told me that I wouldn't have to clean the house or anything, that I would be the queen of the roost. And now I'm the only one here, her queen.... Please go ahead and have something to drink. I think I'll wet my whistle, too. That's what we women say in the village—'Wet your whistle'—drink a bit to get the blood circulating...."

A moment later she smiled and said, "You know, I wanted to ask you why is it that just when you fall in love with someone, off he goes. But if you don't love him, he lives forever. You love him and he's gone—for just a spell or for all time. I make it through the nights that if I had stayed in the village, lived out my whole life there alone, then Boris Mikhailovich and Yelena Victorovna would be alive today. Sometimes I think: If I hadn't fallen in love, there wouldn't have been any war...."

Her face reddened and she looked younger. I thought that she seemed hardly more than fifty, and certainly not a day older.

"Well, then," she continued, dejectedly, "once, at night, Veronika comes to the door and says: 'Liz, your man is at The Lakes with his unit. Run.' I should 'ove left right then.... But I didn't want to go empty-handed, thought he might hate soldiers' rusks, so I baked up some potatoes, a sackful.... I went out. It was very dark, fall. It wasn't early—four in the morning, no earlier. The Lakes was fifteen versts away—a beautiful place, all silvery 'cuz o' the shallow water. But you sure can't run fast with a sack. I see a troop train standing there with big guns all covered up. The semaphore wasn't letting them through yet. Each soldier at a gun. Well, I run from gun to gun. I found this man—older, hefty, a man who'd been around. I begged 'im to take me. We get on the train and start off.... I could hardly believe my luck. I hugged that old sack and near whooped for joy. The railroad goes right by The Lakes. The troops, o' course, wouldn't wait for me, but I thought: 'Never mind. I'll make it. The potatoes won't fall to pieces and I'm no pearl.' But that semaphore didn't let us by. Their commander— young, skinny face.— gets out o' the engine and says to me, 'A bag toter, eh? Out you go!' The older one takes my part: 'Pity the poor woman.' The commander shouts to him: 'Is this a bloody cart or a troop train?' Well, I was sad that I was the undoing of a good man. I get off with my sack and run ... ten versts and more to go. My high spirits from over with the guns didn't last long. 'Run,' I kept sayin' to myself, 'Run. You'll make it 'fore sunrise. Don't get yourself all worked up—they can't set off in the dark.' The sun was already blazin' over The Lakes when I dragged myself there. I see some young fellas in greatcoats lying on heaps of leaves. I go up to one: 'Have you seen Anton Ivnev?' 'There're a thousand of us over here,' he says, 'look yourself.' I run around The

Lakes three times till I find out: he left at dawn. I sit down with my sack. A soldier comes over, bends down and says, 'Don't cry there, mom, you know he's not dead—he's alive!' 'Well, the night must 'av' really tuckered me out,' I think to myself, 'if he takes a young girl like me for somebody's mother. Maybe it was for the best my man didn't see me lookin' like this.' And that soldier made me feel good, saying, 'Be happy there, mom, come on now—he's alive!' I handed out the potatoes to those soldiers and really started feelin' like somebody's mom. I talked on with them a while. And that soldier kept right on: 'Come on now, be happy, he's alive....' She stopped to catch her breath. "I got the notice a month later." And then she grinned, "For five years and more I couldn't even look at a potato. 'It s 'cuz of them,' I thought, 'I lost the last joy in life.'" She fell silent, her face grew sterner. "Nawh, a bride's no wife. Some women 'av' lost lots more than me."

There was a noisy burst of wind. Through the washed-off splotches of the window pane one could see the courtyard grow darker. When I looked at her again she was smiling.

"Wouldn't you like a piece of pie with nuts? Let's have tea," she said with a kind, soft laugh. Again she seemed older. "And 'Rebral, he's our pal'," she laughed.

After the tea and that wonderful pie (when did she ever find time to bake it?) she told me that Boris Mikhailovich "followed Yelena Victorovna to the grave". She said that some kind people found her a job at the Hermitage. At first she worked in the fifth-century room—where Socrates is. Because of her rheumatism and bad heart they then moved her to the Rembrandt room, one of the warmest rooms in the museum. She said that the woman "guarding the fifth century", however, was in poorer health than she was. And since the fifth century was as cold as it was outdoors, she felt that because she was now feeling much better, in all

good conscience, she should trade with the woman. "I've been warm and I feel better...."

When I was leaving and we went into the anteroom, I was again struck at how bent over she was, how incongruous it was with her kindly face and grandmotherly wrinkles.

"But maybe you'll wait for 'juif âgé'?" she smiled guiltily. "They're holding him up for some reason, confounding things...."

I walked Baskov Lanc thinking how the woman who seemed so old to me, had so secretively, boldly, and youthfully called herself a *bride*....

When I returned to Moscow I did not write any stories about Rembrandt and thus I felt the tremendous urge to create something—a desire familiar to any writer who intends to write something great but cannot come upon an original approach. Rembrandt lived within me but was, as yet, a promise unfulfilled. Even philosophical ideas about the secrets of his work were unable to help me satisfy this urge. And probably this is why I so longed to talk with him, with Rembrandt the man. I had earlier experienced something like this with Andersen. He was always beside me during the evening hours at home, and on airplanes, in distant and strange towns. He told me many new, fascinating stories and gave quite a lot of valuable advice. And at times I told him things I wouldn't have dared tell my oldest friend. And before Andersen, it was the same way with Stendhal.

Experience has taught me that it is important to pose a bold and perhaps even a painful question at the very beginning. And if it is answered, then one will feel the pain and joy of the birth of a living human being, a living understanding between oneself and him. Then it can be *your* Andersen or *your* Stendhal. Now I wanted *my* Rembrandt. I wanted it so badly that I dared to ask what is perhaps one of the cruellest questions in life.

More than 100 self-portraits of Rembrandt have come down to us. Through the years the clothing became poorer, tones darker and the bearing and the facial expressions more royal. In the very last self-portrait the image seems washed away a bit just as if plunged into water (the waters of oblivion). In this self-portrait it is not easy to recognize the person who, 30 years before, had sat at a table, and spiritedly raised his goblet on high as he held Saskia on his lap. This last portrait seems to have been fashioned by fingers that were no longer obedient. But at times it seems that it was not at all created by human hands, but by some substance Rembrandt had worked with for long decades. And, once his hands grew old and weak, then perhaps, as in one of Andersen's fantastic stories, this substance came to his assistance. And at night, when the sick, lonely artist dreamed of the happy Saskia sitting in a home filled with rare and wonderful things, or about Titus—a little boy again drawing at the window, or of the sweet sad face of Hendrickje Stoffels, or perhaps of his childhood in the mill and the dust of flour rising in a dusky gold column of sunlight—perhaps then this marvellous portrait was given birth. It is a gift of the earth—plains, hills, streams and trees, a gift of the heaven, the sea, kind people, in sum, it is a gift of the world which he drew without ever tiring, when his hands were strong. Looking at this painting—there is nothing like it in all of world art—one thinks that perhaps his brush painted it all by itself, that there was no great skill involved, that it is not a painting at all, but life itself.

I decided not to ask *this* Rembrandt my question. I felt it would be easier and kinder to ask one of the earlier and majestic Rembrandts. But then I thought that perhaps he would not honor my question with an answer. And so, with heart-felt agony as well as genuine physical pain, I gathered up my courage. It was an explicit question: Why didn't any one of his *overwhelming* personal

tragedies deprive him—even for an hour—of his inspiration, his skill? It even seems that they bolstered his skill and inspiration. The magnificent Saskia dies, his whole home is sold for a song, a home filled with treasures—from Raphael's paintings to the wonders of the sea—and success, fame and fortune leave him altogether. His beloved friend, Hendrickje Stoffels, dies; his fellow artists either cease to understand him, leave him or die, and Titus, his only son, dies. Yet he goes on painting and painting, not stopping for a day, an hour, or a minute. Perhaps one might think that Rembrandt had no heart—if it were not for the heart-breaking humanity of his later canvases.

Of course I realize that personal loss and the blows of fate cannot but broaden an artist, and work, of whatever kind, lessens the pain. But here we do not have a blow, a loss, or a misfortune; it is a catastrophe, atomic devastation that destroys the basis of life. One can compose music or paint under artillery fire, but not in Hiroshima when murderous lightning hung over the city. The lightning of thermonuclear destruction hung over the fate of Rembrandt, reducing life to ashes. And yet in the face of all this he worked on with unsurpassed skill. Rembrandt could be placed alongside the biblical Job and Shakespeare's Lear, for like they he gained wisdom in a mad world of unjust misery and tremendous personal losses. But both Job and Lear are legendary figures, while Rembrandt was entirely real. He drew wisdom not from the sorrows of the heart, nor from solitary reflection, but from work. He withstood blows which, in physical terms, neither a tree, a rock, or iron could endure and he painted and painted, not stopping work for a moment. He was shunned, accused of heartlessness, but—with his fingers, nails, and the handle of his brush—he fashioned children, trees, women, hills, old men—life! He turned the most "insignificant" things into elegance, discovered the mysteries of the "commonplace". And fate, before

which even the mythical heroes of antiquity had yielded, could not force him to put down his brush.

I wanted the Rembrandt of this last self-portrait, the Rembrandt who was "washed away", who did not seem to be painted by Rembrandt himself—I wanted this Rembrandt to tell me the secret of his courage. He answered: "*No one died, nothing departed, nothing was lost, the bountifulness of the world is infinite.*" This was a cruel response, but perhaps there is no other answer to a cruel question. But hadn't I answered the question for the Rembrandt, who has been "washed away"? Didn't I answer it when I wrote that he fashioned life with his fingers, nails and the handle of his brush? He had felt the endlessness of existence, immortality. Why then should he not answer: "No one died"?

No one?! But what about Saskia, with her cute, childlike mouth, her carefree half-smile and lovely hands?... The one and only Saskia. Can immortality on canvas suffice for love? What is eternity worth if they bury the one thing one loves most in this world?

"But did you see my face when Saskia died?" he said, answering a question with a question.

"But how could I possibly see it? Did you paint yourself as you were at that moment?"

"Yes, I painted."

"Then I will find it; I will see that face."

"You will not see it," the "washed-away" Rembrandt answered. He was leading me to an idea I had guessed at even earlier, an answer to one of my old doubts.

I had been preoccupied for a long time with a riddle about one of Rembrandt's paintings, the one which, just as Yelizaveta Yevgrafovna told me, had changed its name from "The Reconciliation of David and Absalom" to "Adieux de David a Jonathan". But what had disturbed me was not the different combination of biblical names, but the very human essence of the canvas and the fact that its composition was quite unlike Rembrandt's other



work. A man in eastern dress, whose face expresses sorrow and solitude (we recognize Rembrandt himself here) embraces a second person who, judging from his stature, is younger and is distraught about whatever it is that is causing their embrace: parting, loss, catastrophe. In the background we see the fantastic outline of the tower which suggests a town ruthlessly bombed—the ever-present Hiroshima. The man, who looks similar to Rembrandt, is standing with his face toward us. It is one of the finest, most courageous, and bitter of his self-portraits. The face of the second, who is overcome by grief (or is he now growing quiet after weeping?), is not visible. It is concealed in the heavy folds of the eastern clothing of the man consoling him with a mute, fatherly, tender embrace. To the best of my memory this is the only Rembrandt painting in which a person is shown this way, so that his face is not visible. Usually the artist reveals the faces of individuals even when the theme of the work does not really demand it. In the painting of the prodigal son we see the son as he returns home after a long separation. He falls on his knees before his father, guiltily sinking down into his threadbare clothes. We see the face and hands of the father, we see the faces of those witnessing his return. We even see the face of the son though he is on his knees with his back to us, exposing his blistered soles. We probably wouldn't be able to see his face if we observed the event in real life, instead of in the museum.

But we do see it: the artist's brush perceptibly turned the lowered head of the son—Rembrandt was not able to paint a person without a face!

Why then in "Adieux de David à Jonathan" did he sacrifice the face of the figure, who is sobbing or has just stopped sobbing, in Rembrandt's embrace? Why in this canvas did he violate a law upheld in his hundreds of other canvases?

The picture was painted in what was a fateful year for Rembrandt, 1642, the year Saskia died. This explains the grief and seclusion, the courageous, stunned expression on Rembrandt's face and the tragic background of the painting. But it did not explain to me, for a long time, the riddle of the hidden face of the second figure.... And later I understood: if we could perform a miracle and turn the face toward us we would again see—the face of Rembrandt! The *second* face in this painting is obviously distraught, openly weeping. The essence of the painting is in the wisdom of a proud heart and the triumph over fate. No one in the entire world saw his tears, they were hidden in the folds of the clothes of the first Rembrandt, a courageous man who has gained wisdom in sorrow. But the figure without a face is, all the same, one of the most moving of the artist's self-portraits.

Now I can answer the question of whether I saw his face when Saskia died. I did. The relationship between us was frank and honest, though excitement or affection did not, even for a moment, leave me during our conversations. We spent long hours talking about man and he told me things of infinite importance that have played a tremendous role in my understanding of the world. He helped me to better understand the people around me and these people helped me, in turn, more fully understand his canvases. He said that most of his contemporaries could not realize their potential in verse, music, love and good deeds. He said that man, in his inner depths, is incomparably richer than he appears on the surface. With each epoch we must become more and more conscious of this difference and as mankind develops the difference will become less and less tragic. He told me about women who died without ever falling in love, or who fell in love but never came to know the fullness of life. He talked about poets who never wrote a line, and even about artists who did not leave one canvas behind. He spoke of people who did not

create even a hundredth of what they were capable of, of people who did not carry through what they were born to do. He helped me sense the very essence of man, to keenly perceive his unfulfilled promise. And I better understood the golden twilight of his paintings and their sorrow. He told me about burned manuscripts, ruined canvases, broken hearts, and unfulfilled promises.

"I didn't write back," Yelizaveta Yevgrafovna wrote in the fall, "because the doctors put me in the hospital for a long while. I lived in the country and didn't get sick, ran barefoot in the snow. Nothing phased me. But your city life wore me out. In the ward here I tell how we cure people in the village. Worrywarts go to the hospital and return with a box of powders to take. You can take them for your head, your lumbago, your stomach. And they're a comfort for the children, too. I remember when one of mine fell sick, the other four all wanted to take the mixture. It was made with sugar—was like fine pastry to them. Katya, the youngest—she died later on of some terrible skin disease—well, she once drank down a whole bottle of cough medicine. I remember, I go to see her and she's laughing and licking her lips.

"I didn't tell you the other time that after my older sister died there were five children left. I raised them, there was nobody else because her man didn't come back from the war. The four grew up and flew off in different directions. They write now and then. Andrei writes. The girls don't since of course their own kids come along. Andrei goes all over. He doesn't write real often, but when he does there're good ones. I read one of his rascally letters here in the ward and the doctor on duty ran in to quiet us down. Pretty noisy, you know, for a hospital.

"But now my spirits are picking up. They took care of me, stopped my misery and were real kind.

And now I cheer up the others, though I was sure scared to death at first.

"Before the operation I had a dream that I bent over and my heart fell out. I picked it up off the ground, but it was old and broken down. I cried over it thinking, 'Now how will I go on living?' In the morning on the operating table, I cheered up when I saw all around those young, good-looking people in white gowns. 'Aren't they really going to save an old fool like me?' I thought. They fanned me and I began to doze but I didn't fall asleep and was afraid they'd start before I was deep asleep. I say: 'Wait, I'm not out yet.' They got a real tickle out of it. Then they gave me a shot near my shoulder and I began to really fall asleep that time. And I feel someone bending over me. I couldn't keep from looking so with my last strength I look and it's the head doctor. And I wanted to say something good, something kind to him but it came out all foolish: 'your face,' I say, 'you have such a....' And I slept just like the dead. And now I don't have much longer to wait. They'll let me out and 'Rebral is my pal'. It's shameful, of course, to think about it but I want to live, to go back to the museum, to them...."

I would open the volume Yelizaveta Yevgrafovna gave me and read many times, with emotion, the inventory of Rembrandt's paintings, furnishings and household utensils—one of the few documents that has come down to us. It has the mark of the epoch and the spiritual world of the artist; the inventory was compiled by clerks after Rembrandt went bankrupt, and was preserved in the archive of the Amsterdam town hall. Later everything was put up for sale for next to nothing at an auction: paintings, furniture, and household utensils.

The person who compiled the inventory (it took two days: June 25 and 26, 1656) was fastidious and precise; he wrote the financial statement. His dispassionate titles are all the more heart-rendering: "An old book containing Rembrandt's

sketches", "a book bound in black leather with Rembrandt's best sketches", "copies of landscapes drawn by Rembrandt", "a book of Rembrandt's drawings of nude male and female figures", "a folder of Rembrandt's drawings of ancient sculptures", "a book of Rembrandt's drawings of animals", "a notebook of sketches of landscapes drawn by Rembrandt", "a book containing statues drawn by Rembrandt".... These notebooks, folders, and books; which reveal the artist's patient and joyous study of nature, the world, were put up for auction along with his trunks, dressers, and chairs, and were sold at a lower price. And afterward they rotted away in those very same trunks, were covered with dust, went to heirs, and disappeared for a time or forever. For centuries the winds blew the pages all around the world, and who knows today what has found its way to museums and what has been lost to humanity? Wasn't the "black leather" binding on the book of Rembrandt's "best sketches", more valuable than the artist's work, to a burgher who then bought them?

Shopkeepers of "the most exemplary bourgeois republic" (Marx) had no love for and did not understand Rembrandt. They could not but condemn him for the very thing Marx, 200 years later, would admire in the great artist: he painted the Holy Virgin in the image of a Dutch peasant woman. Rembrandt's democracy was utterly foreign to the Dutch burghers. Near his home were the poorest areas of Amsterdam and there he painted wise old men who preserved biblical majesty and human virtue in their poverty and humiliation. He also painted beggars who had neither food nor shelter, a plight the artist himself would share later on. For Rembrandt, the son of a miller and grandson of a peasant, these faces told far more of "eternal man" than the faces of burghers and aristocrats, even of patrons of art.

"154. Heraclitus. 155. Two porcelain figures. 156. Nero. 157. Two iron helmets. 158. Japanese

helmet. 159. Carpathian (?) helmet. 160. Roman emperor. 161. Head of a Negro, sculpted. 162. Socrates. 163. Homer. 164. Aristotle..." the pen of the clerk recorded without reproach the respective disposition of goods in order. With pure burgher logic it questioned the genealogy of the helmet, but it was absolutely positive about the rest: porcelain is porcelain, Socrates is Socrates....

There is a bust of Socrates in the room of the Hermitage containing the art of antiquity—fifth century B. C. (where, in winter, it is indeed as cold as it is outdoors). The bust probably in no way differs from the one found in Rembrandt's home. But in contrast to the other busts—Athena, Apollo, Artemis, Aphrodite—Socrates strikes one as having an ugly face. He has a turned-up nose, his face is asymmetrical, pitted, and even today seems a challenge to harmony, proportion, and to the corporeal divinity of the world. And in ancient days, the age of Socrates, this face must have shaken his contemporaries no less than his blasphemous ideas.

I like to think that a similar bust stood in Rembrandt's home. It is a thought that makes the artist especially dear and human, it makes him *my* Rembrandt.

The most painful lines of the inventory refer to Rembrandt's son, young Titus: "298. A painting of three dogs by Titus van Ryn. 299. Book of drawings by the aforementioned...."

None of the persons researching the life of the great artist has succeeded in finding the works of Rembrandt's son. Rembrandt's great portrait of Titus drawing has come down to us, but the drawings themselves have not survived.

Saskia died after Titus was born, and before Titus she had given birth to three children: a boy and two girls. They died. We usually judge Rembrandt's early family life from the well-known "The Artist's Own Portrait with His Wife Saskia"—with its dancing colors of tapestries and

sparkling wine, from the portrait of Saskia depicted as the heavenly Flora, and from "Danaë". We try not to notice the sad shadows of the late portraits of Saskia and the self-portraits of Rembrandt. It is natural that we want to think that during his brief period of success in life, Rembrandt was happy and carefree. But in his seemingly sunny world were three dead infants—three children, three unfulfilled promises. But this is not revealed in the portraits of Saskia or in the self-portraits. It is revealed in two paintings, one of which is "Night Watch", a work that does not seem to have the slightest relevance to what we are now discussing. The subject of "Night Watch" is famous: the Banning Cock Company is setting out on a march—one person is beating a drum, another is loading a musket, another is raising a flag. The atmosphere of the painting is permeated with military pride, and there is a rather dramatic touch in the depiction of happy people whose powder is already damp. It is one of Rembrandt's most charming physical canvases and recent restoration work has wonderfully brought the figures to life. For long decades the painting hung in the Amsterdam infantry guild, where damp peat burned in the fireplace. It became darker from the smoke, as if true to its mysterious name: "Night Watch". But a number of questions also arose. Recently, under the soot and later layers of paint the restorers discovered sunny Rembrandt tones. Thus the old name was curious, but there was another riddle—the girl in the crowd of armed people. What was she doing there, and why is she in that particular place on the canvas? It is the brightest and most radiant spot of the canvas, and a number of investigators interpreted her (before the restoration) as a ray of light contrasting with the somber tones. They were convinced Rembrandt was using the girl to light up the dark night. But it is night no longer, and the girl is still there. She has become even more of a riddle. Why did the artist depict her

among these people, people who *do not see her*? The majority of the figures in the painting are shielded by one another and this brings forth the ire of some of the soldiers who are very close together, pushing one another, practically standing on top of one another. But the girl is out in the open. Had this not been a group of burghers parading in full military dress, but a real battle in a moment of real danger, the girl would be an extremely easy target. Her defenselessness amidst gunpowder in this theatrical picture is shocking. But the girl is not a riddle for me, she arouses my fears for her safety, alarm over a world in which beating a drum is more important than protecting a child. I believe the Amsterdam burghers who had previously patronized Rembrandt, flatly rejected this painting not only for purely formal motifs (a figure may not have looked like a particular person or someone may have not been put in a place of honor), but also because Rembrandt, with the intuition of a genius, captured the inhumanity of a world in which the bourgeois wanted to feel confidence, joy and comfort. All this, of course, does not merely lie on the surface of the painting where the night-like tones lay. Nor could the best restoration work reveal the artist's thoughts and feelings which he probably could not have expressed in speech in logical form. But there is a certain, hidden logic in the artistic image, the stroke of a brush, which bears within itself the truth about the world. Rembrandt was true to this logic, always.

His canvases are, for me, strikingly contemporary. In the *girl standing out in the open* I see Ann Frank, the girls from Auschwitz, from Hiroshima. I wish at least one of the figures of "Night Watch" would shield her with his own body, but they are all too busy with themselves. And their clothes, weapons, and bearing all express militancy.

But in this girl I see not only Ann Frank. I see, and not just in my mind, Saskia's features. Saskia and this girl are strikingly alike, as though they are



mother and daughter. Rembrandt was painting the daughter which he did not have.

When Saskia was expecting her fourth child, Rembrandt began his "Sacrifice of Manoah". In the famous bible story he recognized what it was that made it particularly moving, sad, and yet hopeful. The angel appears before Manoah and tells him he will have a son.

The wife is on her knees in prayer before the sacrificial fire. The shaken Manoah believes and yet does not believe in the miracle: a living child, a living son, after those who were born dead. There are three figures in "The Sacrifice of Manoah": old Manoah, his wife, and an angel who has the tender face of a boy. We see this young radiant face although the angel is flying away from us, at an angle, with his head turned toward heaven. (Rembrandt here too has remained true to himself.) This is perhaps one of the master's most personal canvases, and this does not prevent it from being one of the most universally human. On earth, or on any one of the celestial bodies, a man will wish for a miracle, believing and not believing in it, and will have no peace until the wish comes true.

Saskia was dead, Titus was alive. Rembrandt often drew his son and in these portraits there is a living sensation of the miracle performed. But I do not believe that Titus was actually like the Titus of Rembrandt's drawings and canvases, no more than the rest of the people Rembrandt painted looked like his portraits. Rembrandt cared more about conveying the spiritual essence of man than accuracy of depiction. I think that the Titus he painted was even less similar to Titus in real life than were his paintings of Saskia, Hendrickje Stoffels, and Jeremias de Dekker because the portraits of Titus so strikingly recall the face, general appearance and corporeal radiance of the angel in "The Sacrifice of Manoah" painted before Titus was born. It seems incredible that Rembrandt could paint Titus before he ever saw him, but, as often happens with that

artist of genius, the fantastic becomes a real part of the human spirit if one tries to discover its essence. From the very beginning, even before birth, from the first minutes of hope, Titus was a miracle for Rembrandt. And Titus remained a miracle until the artist, the same age as Manóah, found Titus—who was then 27 and expecting his own child, his own Titus—dead.

Rembrandt captures the miracle in the image of a boy, a youth. The portraits of Titus are probably his brightest canvases, created by a joyous brush, fashioned by shining, happy brushstrokes. They reveal the great corporeal richness of man. And should one feel a certain sadness before the paintings, then it is because one senses this frail beauty cannot last forever.

"298. A painting of three dogs by Titus van Ryn. 299. Book of drawings by the aforementioned. 300. The head of Mary, by the aforementioned....

"309. Old trunk. 310. Four chairs with black leather seats. 311. A pine table....

"338. Two small paintings by Rembrandt..."

What happened to those two small, nameless paintings, and to the three dogs painted by his son?

"363. Several collars and cuffs."

He left his home, with Titus and Hendrickje Stoffels, now a beggar who had entirely lost all his possessions—from the Raphael and the ancient sculptures to shirts and table linen. But still, at that moment there had never been a person richer than he. He went to the cheapest inn in Amsterdam feeling that he had essentially lost nothing, for neither a creditor nor an auction could rob him of his true wealth. Fate had delivered a blow that seemed shattering at a time when his spiritual "I" had already been above fate. In none of the myths of antiquity is there anything similar: man, even the strongest man, was unable to rise above *fate*. But fate, that solemn, mysterious and exacting word, sounding like a cosmic roar, the roar of the ocean, of an earthquake, seems unnatural and inorganic,

as it were, when applied to Rembrandt. Rembrandt was at odds with fate, mightier than fate itself.

In his self-portraits of the 1650s and 1660s, we see the magnificent Rembrandt—in a pauper's, a beggar's dark, old testament robes. (The precious bright tapestries, vibrating in "The Artist's Own Portrait with His Wife Saskia", had found themselves new owners after the auction.) Above the dark and threadbare clothes there radiates a face of wisdom and majesty akin to those of King Lear and Job.

But often I see, in my mind, on a deserted side-street of old Amsterdam, yet a different Rembrandt—a man grown old and feeble before his time, a man whose face is bathed in twilight tones, a man walking on unsteady legs. It seems that he will fall down on the clean, wet cobblestones at any moment. He died in his bed, in a dream, forgotten by Amsterdam. Europe was warring, trading, discovering and was not concerned about Rembrandt. They buried him quietly, as they buried obscure paupers, and for a long time his canvases gathered dust in the shops of second-rate merchants and eccentric collectors. Later they were handed down to posterity along with the bed linen and silver spoons. And still later they rotted in shops where cheap artefacts are briskly bought and sold. And only 200 years later did the great revival of Rembrandt begin.

"Happy New Year," Yelizaveta Yevgrafovna wrote me in January. "I'm already back at work, feeling fine and wish you the very best.

"I came into the room and felt a bit dizzy, so I sat a spell and then wandered around, my knees shaking. But I was in such good spirits after that quiet hospital.

"I went up to the 'old man', looked, and his face and hands were just like I'd rubbed them the night before with goose grease. I felt sorry for Uriah, the

old men, and I had to see the 'Return'. I moved this way and that way, standing before them just the way you did. I fidgeted around a bit and saw there in the darkness something I'd never dreamed of. I saw Anton. I never once saw him in the room and now there he is, looking at me. But he's not young, he's old like they didn't kill him, like he went on living and grew old just like me. 'It's all right,' he says, 'it's all right, Liza.' I moved my head and he slipped away, but then came back again. It's a miracle that you look at a big, dark canvas, move this way and that, and faces come out? And then I was thinking later on, in my chair, that if it hadn't been for you and your fidgeting about I never would have found him and he'd be waiting, saying, 'It's all right, it's all right, Liza, I'm here.' And there he is terribly old, older than I am even, and dark, dark, sad.

"Later, of course, all the people came in, the tours. But at the end of the day when hardly anyone was left I went up to your favorite, 'David and Jonathan'. You'll have to forgive me, but I felt sorry for you when I read in your letter how the second person in the painting is probably Rembrandt too, but sobbing, with a wet, sad face, and how maybe this face is still on the canvas, but we can't see it just now because Rembrandt painted over it later, out of pride. He changed the position of the head so he wouldn't give himself away. When I was reading your letter, I don't know for what reason my heart ached for you. I went up to 'David and Jonathan' and decided then and there to go up to one of the important people here and ask him to lighten the canvas—just like they brightened up 'Danaë'—so maybe they'll really find your sobbing Rembrandt. I'll send you a picture of it so you can rest easier....

"I'm just fine now like I never was in my life before. I'm happy when I go home at night that I'll come back the next day and the next. Maybe it speaks badly of me—but that woman, the sick one

in the fifth century—I decided not to switch with her, unless she freezes in the cold and falls sick. I can't live without him.

"Just in case your letters to me are lying there in the bookshelf with the books. I found that big, fine 'Night Watch' and the girl there is like the sun—I squinted from the pain. Boris Mikhailovich didn't have 'Manoah' but I'll find it, don't you worry. I'll look at that angel. I haven't seen any angels since childhood, since I stopped going to church and I had forgotten all about them. But now I really want to see them...."

I can't live without Rembrandt, either. I remember well that spring day I came to him from the station, went up the main white staircase, quickly walked through the suite of rooms with their precious gobelin tapestries, through the rooms containing Raphael, Titian, Van Dyke. I remember how my heart skipped a beat when I stopped at the threshold and looked at the blinding gold "Danaë". Then I turned to greet Yelizaveta Yevgrafovna. But there was a heavy woman I did not know sitting there in her place. I went up to her and inquired: "Is this Yelizaveta Yevgrafovna's day off? Or is she," I asked gesturing, "down in the fifth century?" And then I heard these words:

"She died last winter."

I stood before the canvases, seeing nothing, forgetting entirely about Rembrandt, as if I knew she'd come back to me, here, just as all those whom she loved came back to her in this very room.

# REFLECTIONS

I have talked about people who have gained a place in the memory of mankind for all time, about people, now living, who do not dream of immortality, and I have talked about people who tomorrow will climb higher, revive the very best things of the world and derive strength and joy from them. Thus, I have woven a narrative of reality and fantasy upon one genuinely absolute element: the strength of the human spirit which in the fifteenth and the twentieth and all future centuries will, in higher and higher levels of development, be apparent in the values created by the earth—the most fantastic of the heavenly bodies.

I have presented two constellations, but there are incomparably more in all of man's universe.

The moment arrives in which the constellations are not perceived from without, but found within—within ourselves.

The author senses constellations within himself and in the hope that the reader too will become aware of his own constellations, we will move on now to the last stage of our journey. And the solemn, star-studded heavens will come along with us.

## Boys and Girls

A philosopher once exclaimed, "Oh, what would the world be like if there were no children!" Perhaps the philosopher happened to have been moved at that moment by the sight of children playing around a Christmas tree or outside in the open air. Such thoughts undoubtedly come directly from the heart but, though one may take pride in them, the world will not change for the better because of them. It must be assumed that there has never been a century in which people did not ask themselves and those around them another question: What will happen to the children who are being brought into this world? This question is less elevated, but it stimulates one to act.

In the middle of the second century B.C., uprisings of slaves shook Sicily. The slaves had children—little slaves. Once, on the eve of an uprising, a good soul from the town of Agrigento who apparently loved philosophy, invited a cruel slaveowner to his home. He also invited the children of slaves to sit at the table—alongside the slaveowner—and treated them to nuts and figs. History, which is often indifferent to good deeds, preserved the name of this humane individual—Poliantes of Agrigento. Personally, I doubt whether this meal made the slaveowner act more kindly toward young slaves—either his own or those of other slaveowners. It is probable that the opposite happened: if he had previously humiliated and tortured young slaves with unconscionable cruelty, then after the touching dinner in



Poliantes' home his attitude toward the slaves perhaps took on nuances of vengeance for the humiliation he himself had undergone.

On the first day of the uprising the slaveowner and his wife were killed. They had a daughter and her fate was indeed remarkable: no one laid a hand upon her—she was entrusted to reliable people who were to take her over the mountains to her relatives. She was the only member of her family who was good to slaves and they could not but repay her in kind. And, if we might not see anything amazing in this, it is because after more than 20 centuries of struggling for a better world, our feelings and our consciousness have changed—the genuinely humane has begun to seem something that is understood in itself. If one is to sense the amazement here, one must try to imagine the atmosphere of the uprising.

A slave indeed had a hard life—if his slow, torturous death can even be termed a life. When persons who have undergone endless suffering desperately attack their torturers, can one expect kindness from them? As it turned out, however, revenge was foreign to them; not one hair could fall from the girl's head—the daughter of a man who had treated their children mercilessly,—if she herself was innocent. And if she had been good to the slaves they too, despite all else, could be kind to her. For some reason I would like to think that amidst the terrors of the uprising, the slaves who protected the girl experienced great joy. It was the joy of the birth of a great new morality.

Need it be mentioned that when Romans put down the uprisings, they killed slaves—young and old alike—with equal cruelty? Mankind cannot be improved by the act of giving nuts and figs to children—in the presence of their torturers.

Twenty centuries later Marx spoke, in *Capital*, of the slaves of the "humane" Europe of his day. He depicted their plight with the assistance of Shakespeare. Shylock, in *The Merchant of Venice*, loaned

money to Antonio with the sole condition that, should the money not be returned on the promised day, Shylock would then be entitled to a pound of flesh. In Shylock, Shakespeare created a new alchemy—the alchemy of usury, the ability of turning matter, charged with reason and feeling, into gold. In the world of ready money, man does not rise above “base” metals. Today’s respectable bourgeois society does not especially like to be reminded of the time in which it forced eight-year-old children to work on the same basis as grown men. Apparently, in the middle of the twentieth century it would like children to see it as a kind-hearted, youthful Santa Claus. But in the epoch of the primary accumulation of capital bourgeois society did not care about respectability, it wanted more and more wealth. In *Capital* Marx spoke of the trickery which factory owners resorted to in getting around the especially “naïve” legislation, which so lent itself to abuse, to squeeze the most possible money out of eight-year-olds (eight-year-old children!). To avoid the necessity of hiring additional workers, children were kept at the factory from noon to 8:30 p.m.—with breaks arranged now and then to give the appearance that the children only had a six and one-half hour day, which was sanctioned by law. Or, the children were not given any work until 2:00 p.m. so that they were then forced—in this case, of course, without breaks—to work at the machines until 8:30 p.m.

Marx wrote that some people tried to reveal the immorality of such trickery, but capital answered:

“My deeds upon my head! I crave the law,  
The penalty and forfeit of my bond.”

In Shylock’s self-assured cynicism there is an entire philosophy: let the world rot, so long as I have my bond. Of course, if we look into this closely, the cynicism is not particularly selfless after all. The head, that is to say the conscience, can carry

any burden. The usurer's pocket is a far more sensitive place—it overrides the feelings of his heart. Thus, it is better to have a burdened conscience than an unburdened pocket-book. During the centuries that separated Marx from Shakespeare the heart made itself at home in Shylock's pocket and the conscience hardened and turned to stone. This indeed helped the nineteenth-century Shylock to make the discovery of how child labor could augment his income. Reading through the law ten times—or 100 times—he noticed that before-dinner breaks were stipulated but nothing was said about after-dinner breaks. "Therefore," Marx writes in *Capital*, he "claimed and obtained the enjoyment not only of making children of 8 drudge without intermission from 2 to 8.30 p.m., but also of making them hunger during that time.

'Ay, his heart  
So says the bond.'"

If we use our imagination just a little bit, then the quote from Shakespeare has more force in Marx than it does in Shakespeare's work itself. In *The Merchant of Venice* the usurer goes up to Antonio with a knife—in accordance with their agreement—to cut out the pound of flesh. Imagine for a moment that instead of a grown man like Antonio, there is an eight-year-old standing there! Now look at Shylock, he is no longer wearing clothes typical of the sixteenth century, but an SS uniform. Marx's metaphor for murder was realized in real life in the twentieth century.

And if we think a moment, we see there was some reason for slaveowners, for the church militant, as well as the fascist regime, to hate children. They sensed that children can be dangerous. Childhood is the promise of a new world—and that new world can only be destroyed before it is born.

But oh, how varied are the forms of destroying childhood: from the most bloody—an axe!—to the most subtle, bloodless means; from the monstrous

execution in sixteenth-century Geneva to the sexual revolution of the mid-twentieth century.

In the austere and ceremonious Geneva of Calvin's day a ten-year-old boy was beheaded for raising a hand against his parents. The execution was carried out in a world that had earlier beheld Dante, Raphael. (It would be interesting to find out whether Dante could have managed to find a place in hell worthy of the child's executioners. Was the child at all like the one who the Sistine Madonna brought into the world in her delicate arms?)

Perhaps in the future a historian will research the countless tortures hurled upon the Child and thus determine the price of Perfection. He will write about the young slaves of Rome, the ten-year-old witches burned during the Inquisition, the victims of primitive accumulation, about the boys and girls at Auschwitz. He will find an epigraph for his research in Dostoyevsky, in Ivan Karamazov's thoughts about a child's tear and about world harmony.

Torturing children is, of course, not a metaphysical, but a social evil. The refusal to recognize the greatest values of childhood is a refusal to recognize the values of the human personality. The society which does not know how to evaluate the human personality neither loves nor understands childhood. Eccentrics and wise persons can live in that society, can give figs to children, tell them amazing stories about the world as well as telling the world amazing stories about children. But society will not be better because of it, society will still send, in the fatal hour, the most selfless souls and their charges to the gas chamber,—just as, in our lifetime, they sent Janusz Korczak.

A society can be judged by its attitude toward children and childhood because this attitude also reveals a concept of man. The elevated, spiritual concept of man gives rise to the notion that a child is a miracle. It is quite telling that love for children occupies a particular place in the ethics of rev-

olutionaries. Revolutions are carried out in the name of children.

If there is more childhood in the modern world than there was in past epochs then it is because Lenin, "a boy like any other"\* was born in Simbirsk 100 years ago. Two thousand years ago a "boy like any other", Spartacus, was born into a cruel world; 200 years ago a "boy like any other", Robespierre, avidly read the books of Rousseau; 150 years ago a "boy like any other", Marx, wrote elevated verse....

There seems to be no end to these "boys like any other" or girls like any other, one of whom is Joan of Arc, a second is Maria Volkonskaya, a third—Ann Frank, and a fourth—Tanya.\*\* They lived in different epochs, different countries, but are united by their absolute faith in the triumph of good and by their selflessness.

Yes, there is indeed more childhood in the world today. The fact that man has learned to respect childhood is a grave symptom of his maturation. And no less serious is the promise of a better future.

The earlier a person leaves childhood the more infantilism there will be within him later on. The creative basis of the human personality must be reinforced in childhood.

Children are artists, poets, thinkers. The very expression "untalented child" seems absurd although no one, alas, is surprised to hear "untalented person". Perhaps one of the most important questions of life is why talented children grow up to be untalented people. Where does the talent go? Is it possible that all the talent is used up in a child's drawings, his love for games, and affection

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\* A line from Mayakovsky's poem *Vladimir Ilyich Lenin*.—Ed.

\*\* "Tanya" was the partisan name of eighteen-year-old Komsomol member Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya who was brutally tortured by fascists during the Great Patriotic War.—Ed.

for others? Why are there people, who have so utterly lost their creative talents, that one wonders whether they too could have been, at one time, children?

There are many entirely similar men and women, but there are no children exactly alike. It would seem that differences among persons and differences in character should become more apparent as people grow older. But this is not the case. The differences sadly fade away, leaving only the memory of the wonderfully unique world of childhood. Where has the child gone? Can it really be that a despondent, untalented person who goes around with an ordinary expression on his face and stereotyped phrases—can it be that once he was a child? At times, one may think, the child has really departed, he quietly slipped away at daybreak so that he would not have to turn into this person, he is living somewhere else—drawing, making models, delighting in the world, loving dogs and sunshine. Is there, perhaps, somewhere, a fantastic land of boys and girls who have run away to remain themselves? In this land of the eternal child there is no boy-Socrates or boy-Tolstoy, for they did not need to run away, they live within eternal man. And perhaps in the future the population of this fantastic land will cease to grow, and not a single boy or girl will be added in the next 1,000 years, because man will, in the future, be able to keep the child within himself. The child will have no need to run away. And then the words “untalented person” will seem as absurd as “untalented child” seems today.

But meanwhile, the children are running away and the most distressing thing is that we do not notice it. A person is unhappy to lose a wallet or possessions, but he is hardly disturbed that he has lost the child within himself, which is essentially the greatest possible loss. Goethe's formula should be repeated here (it is not important that Goethe was speaking of courage rather than the child within

us): for those who have lost their courage it would be better had they never been born.

I do not think that what is at work here is a metaphysical evil or some inevitable force—like the Second Law of Thermodynamics which deals with the equalizing of temperatures, entropy, and increasing indeterminacy. Children today are more diverse than grown-ups because of the social, and not the cosmic, imperfection of the world. Some people might argue with me that the cosmic is reflected in the social realm, I would answer that man himself is sufficiently cosmic to rule the world. He will master social power—just as he mastered the secret of fire at the dawn of existence, and now, in the greatest of transitional periods, he is mastering atomic energy. *Capital* is dedicated to the question of mastering social power and one of its most meaningful pages deals with Shylock—as he holds a knife over an eight-year-old child.

There is nothing more defenseless than childhood. Ivan Karamazov's torment is comprehensible to anyone who has not lost the gift of compassion. The pain which we experience, the compassion for a child, cannot be compared with any other feeling. Sharp torment blends with a thirst for action, a sense of our own helplessness with a feeling of oblivion, an aversion to the world with love for life.

One of the highest human feelings, in my opinion, is the feeling of guilt before children. It, of course, stems from compassion, but it is broader and more conscious than compassion. If compassion is, indeed, pain, then the feeling of guilt is itself the thought of pain. But though the essence of this feeling is very humane, we cannot stop here. We must keep going until an awareness of our moral responsibility for the present and the future dawns upon us. The thought of pain must be culminated in action soothing that pain.

The feeling of an ethical responsibility for the future becomes especially urgent when we look ahead and see, in our mind's eye, the child of the

future. We could spend a long time in the sphere of cold logic, talking about the threat to genetics posed by atomic explosions. Or, we could do something quite different. We could try to imagine an ugly girl (like the one depicted by Nikolai Zabolotsky — only still uglier, more unfortunate, and yet happy). She is lame and in 500 or 1,000 years she will wander about a sun-flooded town and down to the banks of the sea, wondering in her loneliness why she is not like other happy young girls. Who will explain to her that the white lightning over Hiroshima on an August day in the legendary twentieth century is fatally linked to her misfortune? But must one really explain this to her? The absurd remains absurd even when it is explained in terms of molecular biology. To an absurd degree, the present is indeed bound to the future.

And isn't the link now apparent between the girl who walked up to the then insane Nietzsche and the girl born as a cripple many years later, because mankind had lost its humaneness long before she was born? In the narrative about eternal man one can allow oneself even to imagine that she and the other girl are one and the same person. (Personally, however, I would like to hope that human reason will be able to defend children from both old and new evils.) I am not putting forth a naïve, unfeasible hope. For surely, among the average boys and average girls who exist today, there is a child of genius.

**THIS CHILD OF GENIUS IS MANKIND.**



# The great Lesson of Childhood

"For a long time I searched for the opening lines of this book.... I walked along with my daughter through the forest seeking the first lines up high in wispy branches and down low on the ground in the leaves or a squirrel suffused in the colors of autumn."

*(Are Wicked Sorcerers Immortal?)*

Once the universe seemed finite and comfortable. Man felt safe and sound in his world, like a child in his own home. The eternal and, reassuringly, unchanging heavens stretched above a motionless earth. Man was the center of this universe as a matter of course; the world had fixed boundaries and man had no reason to look beyond himself. Man was at peace with himself, just as the earth was at peace under its protective heavenly dome. Man, the center of the pre-Copernican age, acquired tremendous powers which would only come to the fore, and gain their own existence, once his own mad curiosity had broken through the heavenly dome and leaped onward to infinity.

When one watches a spaceship launch on television, one well might wonder at the great power within man that is being released, that is taking the form of a spaceship. Man has become incarnate in a spaceship so that having learned the wisdom of outer space, the spaceship can eventually again become man. Marx said that man will return to himself and this is true not only in terms of technology and social power, but also of art. Today beauty has a separate existence, apart from man; it dwells in museums, concert halls, libraries. But is it really impossible that in some epoch beauty will *not be cut off* from the human essence?

That which lives on in art today will begin to influence human relationships and behavior. Man

will become an artist in a different, fuller sense—an artist of life. At the present time this indeed may seem fantastic. And isn't it fantastic that a being who some fifteen thousand years ago huddled around a fire in a cave, is today exploring outer space? To confront the infinity of the universe, face to face and without fear, humanity must sense the infinity within itself. Dante's *Divine Comedy* and Dostoyevsky's novels played no less a role in man's ascent to the cosmos than do interplanetary spaceships. Sometimes it may seem that in its ascent mankind has often lost priceless things. As one of my readers wrote heatedly: "The moment that Dostoyevsky's Zosima fell to his knees before Dmitry Karamazov—in full realization of the fate that would befall Dmitry—was a higher moment than the moment Apollo 12 took off for the moon, speeding away from an earth in which people had lost the gift of understanding."

I sympathize with such agitation though I do not believe that it in any way detracts from the meaning of the flight of Apollo 12 or other flights. I believe that the gift of understanding, clear insight, and the infinity of the spirit that great artists, who have themselves experienced moments of promise, have written about, will be returned to man. They will be returned not merely to be experienced by the select few; they will become a new part of the human spirit. The promise will become true spiritual reality. I believe this will happen because mankind today is yet a child, a child entering adolescence. This is a transitional age in which muscular development is naturally ahead of mental development and physical strength of necessity outstrips moral growth (and all this is reinforced by the technological might of the modern world). It is an age of ugly erotic dreams, ugly aggressiveness, and ugly thoughts about suicide—this is what has infected the present-day Western world. But it is also an age of the formation of high ideals, an age that yearns for courageous and decisive action. It is

an age in which not only the heart, but reason has begun to judge evil, and it is not only one's feelings, but consciousness itself that insists upon the final triumph of good. Moral consciousness and its prosecution of evil is the most important element of the age which I am writing about, and it is making our age a great one indeed.

Mankind is a child of genius, but can it maintain its genius? I would not pretend to give a full answer to this question, but I do want to touch on one point that I am particularly concerned about in this narrative. Mankind will retain its genius if it can somehow succeed in preserving the child within itself. I want the spirit of the child to be preserved in humanity just as it was preserved, to the last possible moment, in Socrates, Raphael, Pushkin.

It is sad to see an individual who is surprised at what he drew, sculpted or wrote in childhood and who, having grown old before his time and ceased to delight in things, cannot believe that he was once capable of using his imagination. It is unbearable to think of humanity in such a situation. But our long, wise and difficult childhood gives one sufficient hopes for the great future of humanity.

As Marx pointed out, the development of mankind was natural—without danger of maturing too soon or dragging out the days of childhood too long. That which seemed lost, later returns with interest. When I read art historians, I often think of this, and if we believe them, then beginning with the bison of the Altamir caves, the artistic genius of mankind has lost something: the sensation of the world in its original force and beauty; the enchanting artlessness of depiction; the feeling of harmony in the corporeal and the spiritual—and a number of similar and no less priceless qualities. But—miracle of miracles—though he loses certain things, man becomes richer from one century to the next. It is worthwhile to think about the essence of these strange losses that, in the end, turn out to be similar to losing a seed in fertile soil! There

were ages (and doesn't our own age help us to understand them better?) when the artistic genius of man seemed lost. But this only signified that strengths were being concentrated on a different great goal and after it was achieved the muses actually returned quite quickly. They did not die, they were just resting. And I suppose they will find themselves in excellent health in the twenty-first century.

The sharp speeding-up of life, which we have ceased to view as something exceptional, creates the illusion that from now on the normal human pulse will be 100 ... 110 ... 120 per minute. But in fact this is not rhythm but non-rhythm, it is also characteristic of a transitional world. It accompanies the culmination of the period of the scientific and technological revolution and will subside once its goals are accomplished. And then too will the spiritual essence of mankind blossom, just as it blossoms in youth.

The mankind of today is an adolescent. His voice is changing and his view of the world is also changing. He loves technology and sports and, unlike his childhood years, he now demands comforts and longs for unknown worlds. Perhaps this is the most romantic, and at the same time, most down-to-earth of human ages.

The wise, old mole of history Marx wrote about is burrowing quite well today. He is changing the face of human society and the face of the planet. The old world of private property and alienation that was shaken by our revolution, is going off into oblivion. A new world is being born, a new man, a new humanity. We are experiencing the changes not of an epoch but an entire era.

The mankind of the new era, the communist era, will carefully select the best from its long, difficult and wise (no—not gold!) childhood: the courage of seekers of truth; the great spirit of revolutionaries; the boundless curiosity of scholars; the selflessness of artists. The new mankind will never forget

Socrates and Lenin. And when one looks closely at the portraits of the amazing faces of great individuals—Raphael, Byron, Mozart—one will sense a certain gentleness.

One of the greatest lessons of the childhood of the world is the infinite worth of man. One of the greatest discoveries was the discovery of the human personality, seeing man as a microcosm. This "child's discovery" is of importance even in terms of the cosmos and infinity. And having made this discovery at the very beginning of life, mankind has won the battle for the future; humanity grasped what was important and understood it in time.

It is not mere coincidence that in today's world the image of man seems in some way deformed—as is so keenly reflected in the art of Modigliani, Chagall, and Picasso. But the wholeness that is lacking will return; the world will come to know a new inspiration in a new, communist era.

At the dawn of humanity the world, too, was restless: mainlands broke apart, continents were covered with ice, and great rivers ran dry. Our long, difficult and wise childhood began with a geological shock in which the world took form and then calmed down—a world later shaken both by the ideas of Copernicus and the decisiveness of Robespierre. And our youth is just beginning in today's social upheavals which are equal inside to the geological shock.

Once, early in the childhood of mankind, a thinker, who had a rather pessimistic outlook, exclaimed, "What will happen to the world once man is gone?" Today we ask ourselves a different question: "What will happen to man *at the end of the world* (i.e., after the Earth has completed its cosmic cycle of existence)?" This new question reveals that the fear of infinity, a fear which has seized man practically since the day lightning tore across the evening sky over his cave, has now disappeared. If earlier one was able to speak of the cosmic consciousness of isolated, outstanding individuals,

then will we not be able to speak tomorrow, with certainty, of humanity's cosmic consciousness? I once wrote about this in a tale entitled "The Fourth Page of Parchment". After it was published I received a number of letters. My readers shared their thoughts with me about man, the world, and immortality. The liveliness and enthusiasm of their comments convinced me that there will come a day when cosmic consciousness will cease to be the happy lot only of geniuses and the select few.

I personally never harbored any "aristocratic" yearnings over great persons. But I often yearn for a great humanity, by which I mean, of course, not uniform personalities of wearisomely identical greatness, not a magnificent but monotonous stately forest, but constellations—*constellations* of millions of suns of different magnitudes and brilliance. I have tried to present a model sample of them in my narrative. And, with the new structure of human consciousness, will there not be new states of the world that today may seem fantastic?

I would like to expand my reader's faith in himself and love for life so that we can better understand our own age, sense the great future of mankind and the joy of awareness, that we are building this future together. And my readers have helped me—their letters and ideas have entered this book on eternal man and have clearly pointed to the concluding thought of this book: LIFE IS CREATIVITY.

## REQUEST TO READERS

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